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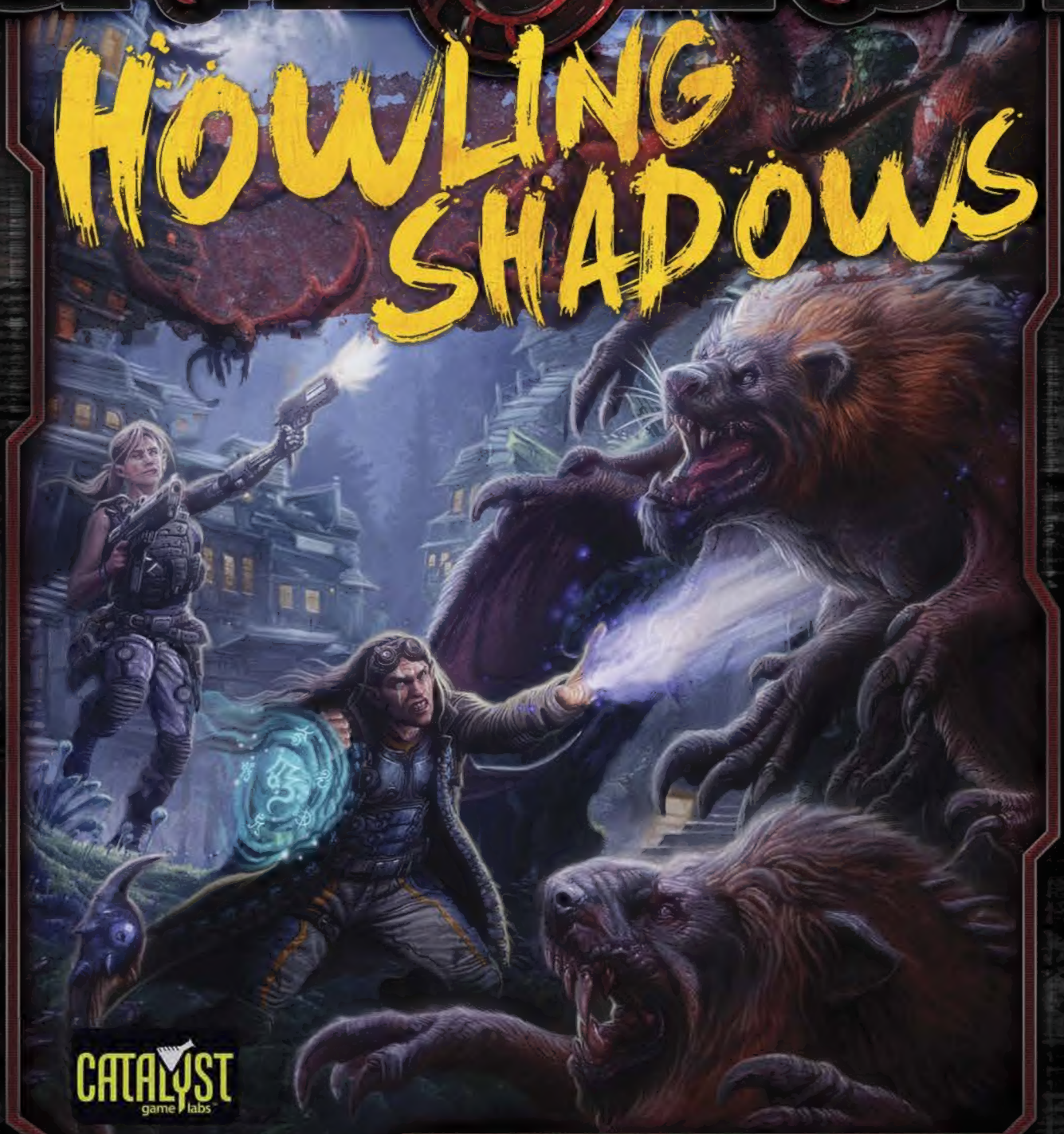
HOWLING SHADOWS



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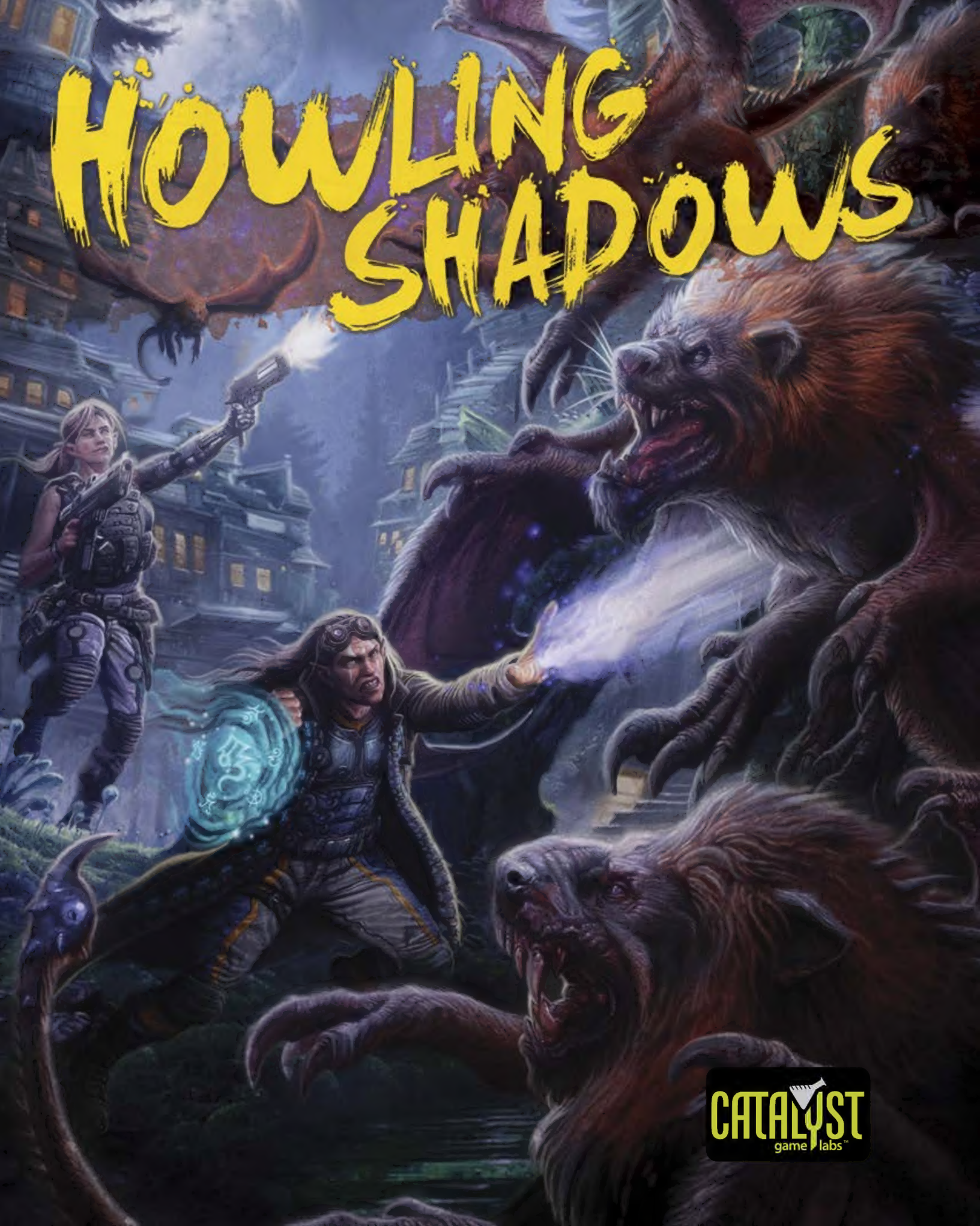
CORE CRITTER HANDBOOK


HOWLING SHADOWS
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INTRODUCTION

In the Sixth World, people usually assume that the thing that goes bump in the night is a group of gangers dumping the body of their latest thrill kill. Denizens are generally so worried about monsters in human form that they don't take much time to worry about actual monsters.

That's a mistake.

The same Awakening that turned humans into dwarfs, elves, trolls, orks, and a large number of other metatypes played a number on the animal kingdom as well, altering and mutating animals in bizarre ways, and bequeathing some species with powers that make them incredibly dangerous, especially if their powers can be put to use by the wrong hands. Which, in the Sixth World, is a high percentage of the hands in existence.

These weapons are going to be used against shadowrunners, so shadowrunners need to know what they are, where they might be found, and what to do about them.

Simply put, they need this book.

Here's what it's got: *Howling Shadows* begins with **Nature Is a Bitch**, providing an overview of the critters of the Sixth World, why runners need to worry about them, and how they might be able to take advantage of the powers they possess. **Untamed Security** becomes a little more specific, detailing security uses for critters, including information on how some specific corps employ them in their security arrangements.

From there, we dive into specific types of critters. While many animals have changed and mutated in the Sixth World, there are still plenty of normal animals; some are listed in *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition*, and more can be found here in the **Mundane Critters** chapter. Then we start getting to the weird ones. **Paranormal Animals** talks about a wide range of animals that have unusual or even magical powers, doing things that runners might not expect and very possibly ruining their day. Some of these critters gained their power through the Infection of the HMHVV virus, and they're unusual enough to earn their own sub-chapter here.

Things get even nastier with the **Mutant and Toxic Critters**, which is filled with beasts who might dissolve the ground they walk on with every step. Since some Infected critters are extreme enough to fit into this category, you'll find more of them here, too.

Then there are the **Extraplanar Travelers**, a listing of critters that seems to grow more relevant with every passing day. From reports of extraplanar breaches all the way down in Antarctica to the meddling of the Seelie Court in the affairs of Tír na nÓg and beyond, extraplanar critters are exerting an increasing amount of influence on the material plane, meaning any runner would do well to know what they're all about.

Then we move on to make sure Matrix denizens don't get too comfortable as they wander the virtual world, since there are critters waiting for them, too. **Technocritters** talks about critters who, like technomancers, have accessed the Resonance, and what they do with that ability. Then there are **Protosapients**, critters that exist solely within the Matrix and provide a taste of wildness inside the carefully manicured digital world.

The last group of critters are **Drakes**, the tools/pets/whatever of dragons who are bound to the service of the giant lizards, but in return get access to some pretty intimidating powers.

Next, **Building Man's Best Friend** allows meddlers and tinkerers to think up their own abominations of nature and set them loose on the streets. **Game Information** has a list of all the new powers in this book, and a table with all critter powers from *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition*. Finally, there are some reference tables to make it easy to find particular critters.

That's what's inside! So move ahead, buckle up, and get ready for a wild ride with critters all too eager to chew you up and spit you up. Just remember that, like your gun, they work best when pointed at someone else.

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NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE

"What the frag is that?" Nightrow stabbed a black chrome finger at a blob in the center of the corpse.

I took a knee on the flagstone of the solarium and prodded the gel with a gloved hand. "They're salamander eggs, I think. They prefer moist locations for their nests, but this is a strange choice. I'd love to stay here a little and look into this." I glanced at my teammates, who wore varying degrees of revulsion. "Or not, but this is useful. Now we know he can't have been dead long. I mean, for his chest cavity to still be moist, even after having been opened up so wide ..."

"Does the size of the eggs tell the size of the parent?" Random's already weak voice cracked.

"No. It could be a parabiological relative of a mundane genus, but my knowledge of parabiology is slim. I only know the fun rumors: owls that strike you terrified and blind, dogs that lead critter armies to fight evil, bats that turn you into stone, but nothing about paranormal salamanders. Mundane animals are fascinating enough."

"Reed, sweetheart? It doesn't matter." Face smiled at me. "We've got what we came for, and we need to go."

I eyeballed him. Sweetheart? Although he was a condescending ass, Goddess he was beautiful. I'm embarrassed to admit he intrigued me. I'd caught him watching me during the boat ride, and now there was this "sweetheart," so maybe the feeling was mutual. He didn't have to be partner material for us to have fun back home.

Nightrow shook his head and examined the flayed corpse of Keben Charger, the island's owner, and a retired, once-famous animal trainer. "What a drek way to go."

"I'm surprised that fazes you." Oss flashed her tusks in a grin. "You know they had to do at least that much to you to install your 'ware. They cut you open, peeled back the layers, scooped out—"

Nightrow twitched, and a thin, black spur shot up out of his forearm, stopping centimeters from the underside of Oss' chin. "I get it! Shut the frag up!"

Oss' grin froze in place on her mouth as it melted from her eyes. "Careful, pup. You wouldn't want us to think you unstable, would you?"

"Ladies and gentleman," Face said, holding his palms out by his sides. "We have six hours to get that chip back to Mr. Johnson. If we miss the meet, we don't get paid. We need to go."

"What was that?" The words shot out of Nightrow as quickly as his spur had. He retracted the spur and grabbed his gun. Oss drew her rifle and stood beside him. They aimed into the jungle beyond the doorway in the northern wall.

The south side of the solarium overlooked the cliff on which the manor house was built. Through the massive hole in the wall behind Face, I could see the sky behind the trees. I watched lightning snake through the clouds, casting the canopy of palms into silhouette over mottled black and blue sky. It would be so easy for something to hide out there. We would never notice a thing until it

BY C2 WRIGHT

snatched one of us up like a doll, and then we would still see nothing. We would only hear screams coming from the dark.

"Holy frag!" Nightrow shrieked. He fired three rounds into the coin vine, flushing out a lynx. The cat leaped clear and at the apex of its jump, dissolved into a white mist that blew away as though propelled by a stiff breeze.

Nightrow screamed and emptied his gun into the darkness, the jungle, the thunderstorm, the island.

Oss roared over the cacophony from behind him. "Knock it off, you idiot! It's gone!"

He stopped firing. His chest heaved and his eyes were enormous.

"You," Oss drove her finger into Nightrow's armored jacket. "Stop being a dumbass and watch our six. The rest of you, follow me."

We filed out of the solarium into the night and rain began to fall in fat drops. Several times light caught my eye, and I whirled to face it, only to find shining marble tree leaves dancing in the rain.

Random fell back a step to walk beside me. "You'd tell us if those eggs were laid by anything we need to worry about, right?"

"That depends: Do you want me to say 'yes' and help you assume the danger's all in your head? Or do you want me to say 'no' and keep you on alert?"

"I don't know." She made a sound in the back of her throat. "I feel so fragging useless out here."

"No, you took care of the security."

"What, four cameras and an alarm?" she scoffed. "But if we need fruit, mice, or seeds, I got you covered, 'cause I found the automated feeders and the drone delivery schedule."

"That's useful too. Now we know he keeps—kept—mostly herbivores."

Random snorted. She glanced ahead, then behind her and spoke quietly. "Do you have a pistol?"

I frowned. "No. I'm a pacifist. 'Harm none' and all that." I turned to look at her, steeled for the look of horror I expected to see. Everyone I'd met so far during my three whole jobs couldn't fathom pacifism.

Random seemed perpetually nervous, but she was positively terrified when her brown eyes met mine.

"Don't worry. Animals will usually leave you alone if you avoid provoking them. Plus, we've got them, right?" I waved a finger in Oss' and Nightrow's directions.

Random looked at her shoes. A wan smile flickered across her face, and two quick steps put her back in line ahead of me.

I shook my head. I may be smart in certain areas, but I am terrible at social interaction. Either I make people uncomfortable, or they make me uncomfortable. And then there's the "why do you believe in nonsense that can't be tested or proven; aren't you a scientist?" And the "why do you perpetuate the closed-mindedness of the god science; aren't you a believer?" I can never answer to

anyone's satisfaction. I have faith in both worlds, and no one seems to understand that's possible.

A blur of white flew past my face, and I ducked reflexively, hands over my head. Random and Face crouched in the same pose a few meters away, and Oss crouched with her tomahawk in hand, ready to strike. Nightrow yelped and loped ahead into the night after it, kicking up clods of earth.

"Get back here!" Face bellowed. "Fragging idiot. Go after him!" He directed the last to Oss.

Oss muttered under her breath and took off after him. We followed, eager to remain together. Several more white blurs darted past us, following Nightrow, who began screaming. I could see nothing but plants and the others' backs as we hurried forward. Nightrow's cries rose in pitch somewhere ahead and then stopped. Branches and fronds smacked me in Random's wake, showering me with accumulated rain.

"Get off him!" I could hear Oss before I saw her, and then I spilled out into the clearing. I caught a glimpse of a white, hawk-sized bird taking flight ahead of Oss's tomahawk swipe. As it flew past, I could make out the red tips of its wings and the darker red of its bill. Nightrow lay on the grass, rain speeding the blood out of his empty eye sockets.

Face knelt beside Nightrow, medkit in hand. I shifted my perception to astral space. The muddy green and red auras that clung to the island were hard to look at and harder to see through; anger, resentment, and some kind of power struggle resided here. Given Mr. Charger's reputation for animal abuse, it made sense. Despite the thickness of it, I was able to assense that Nightrow was dead. A second later, Face announced the same.

"Why didn't you stop him?" Oss wheeled on Random.

"What? How?" She took a half step back.

"He was half machine! You could have at least stopped him, if not made him come back."

"I— What? That's not how..."

"Leave her be." I drew my senses back to the physical world. "Nightrow was twitchy, with drugs or 'ware, I don't know, but it got him killed."

"You listen to me," Oss stepped closer and I had to tip my head to look her in the eyes. "I'm done carrying useless team members. Do your jobs" —she turned to glare at Random, then at me again— "and don't test me."

Random looked like she was going to be sick or cry, I couldn't tell which. Face was impassive as he put his medkit back together.

An owl soared up to land on a nearby branch. As I glanced at it, Oss put her hands to her head and winced. "I can't see!" She whipped her head around, focusing on nothing.

Someone screamed—it may have been me—and bright fear flooded my reptilian brain and my body. They worked in concert to speed me away, running from the clearing as fast as possible. My neocortex suggested there was no reason to run, that I should probably stop, but we ignored it.

The island stopped me instead. There was a heavy tug on my leg, a pop from my ankle, and I hurtled down toward the jungle floor, face first. Pain screamed from my ankle, but the panic seeped away, leaving me blinking and gasping, and I recognized it as a magical effect.

Somewhere a gun fired, but it was nowhere close.

I pushed myself up and bathed my swelling ankle in healing magic. The golden glow brought it back to a normal size and I was able to untangle it from the roots. My commlink chirruped and I scowled at it. Random had sent me a message.

<The others plan to kill you on the trip back. I'm sorry. I don't know how to help other than to warn you. I'm sorry.>

<WTF?> I typed and pressed send, only to get a "no service" message. She must have hacked that message onto my comm somehow. I shoved the comm back into my pocket and rose to my feet. The gunfire had stopped. What was going on?

I had to find the boat before they did. Maybe Random had a plan if I made it back to them, maybe she didn't, but she cared enough to send me a warning. I had to help her off the island if I could.

A sound—close, barely discernible from the thunder—made the hairs on my neck stand up. Deep rumbling from the back of a throat. A cold rod of fear caused me to stand very straight and still. All I could do was turn to find the source. My breathing quickened, and my arms and legs began to tingle as I revolved in a full circle, seeing nothing—wait. In a small hole in the leaf cover, the darkness glinted in a way darkness did not glint. A black eye surrounded by black fur. It was watching me. It was very close. Any heat in my body dribbled away as I stared, and the eye stared back.

A woman's scream pierced the air, and I jumped. It was Random. My gaze shot back to where the eye had been, but it was gone. She screamed again and I ran toward the sound, against my better judgment.

Sheeting rain turned the air white. I leaped over roots and crouched under boughs, my boots squelching in the mud. When the foliage opened up, I stopped short. Face stood a few meters away, partially hidden behind a tree.

"I'm glad to see you," he called out.

"Really?" I called back. "Because I've just heard there are plans for me."

"Plans? Unfortunately, we have no plan other than to get paid."

"I'd bet it would be nice to split that payment into three, rather than four."

He smiled, setting my stomach fluttering with butterflies. Dammit! I raged at myself.

When he spoke, his voice was cool. "I hadn't really considered it, but if you want to, I'm sure we can trim a little dead decker weight."

Anger burned the butterflies to ash. "Who do you think you are?"

He bowed his head, still smiling, and gave it a little shake (What was that? Movement drew my eye for the briefest moment). He stepped out from behind the tree and aimed his pistol at me. "I think," he said as if talking to a child, "that taking payment from new runners is the easiest job in the world. And all that 'if it harm

none, do what you will' crap makes it completely probable that you'll meet a quick end in this line of work. If you're not prepared to do harm, child, someone else will beat you to it."

I took a half step backward, my heart in my throat. "I may be a pacifist, but I doubt she is."

A massive green snake darted down out of the tree just as Face was turning his head to look. He screamed as two enormous fangs lanced his shoulder. As I watched, terrified, the snake picked him up by the shoulder and began to wind itself around him. I could hear the air being pressed out of him. I shook myself; I had to do something. I ran forward, my hands encompassed in a blue glow, ready to oxygenate his body. I could sustain the spell on him and maybe then I could calm the snake—

Multiple snaps and crunching came from the snake's coils as it tightened. Face's arms and legs spasmed once and went limp.

My eyes filled with tears and I flushed with shame; I may not have harmed him myself, but I didn't warn him. A few more snaps as the snake compressed itself around him, and it lifted its head and began to uncoil itself. It looked at me.

I pressed a palm outward toward the snake and magical energy encompassed the animal, visibly relaxing it. Face's body dropped from its coils onto the ground. I locked eyes with the animal, sustained the spell keeping its emotions placid, and rummaged through Face's pockets. I found the chip, shoved it in my pocket, and backed away. The snake slid up into the canopy. I whispered a quick prayer of apology and gratitude, and then backed away.

Once far enough away, I pushed ahead through the grass and scrubbed at my eyes, nearly falling over when the ground disappeared under my feet. I caught myself on a mangrove tree at the edge of the pond that lay before me. My eyes fell upon Random's small body, floating half in and half out of a pond surrounded by forking mangrove roots. A single deep gash ran from the top of her shoulder, through her collarbone, and into her chest. Her brown eyes stared, unblinking, at the sky. Rainwater pooled over them and ran down the sides of her face like tears.

A choked scream escaped my tattered effort to contain it. Out of the corner of my eye I spotted movement and crouched, ready to bolt yet holding on to the tree trunk for protection. Lightning lit up the white forehead and muzzle of what appeared to be a giant raccoon. It sniffed the air, pulling itself up onto its back legs. When I saw its overly long paws clasping the tree roots, I realized what this was.

"What the frag is going on?" I wailed out loud to no one. Two other black masked faces looked up, blinking at me.

I pushed away from the tree and ran, heedless of any other creatures that may have been lying in wait. My boots stomped across the soggy ground, kicking up mud and plant matter behind me. When I broke through the trees onto the beach, I ran toward the surf. I turned to face the rest of the island and put my hands on my knees in a half-crouch, gasping.

A glance down the coast revealed the Waterking a couple of hundred meters down the beach. There didn't appear to be anyone on board or near it. I could see no one else on the beach, and I could hear no one else, though it was hard to hear anything over the sounds of my hammering heartbeat and labored breathing.

I walked toward the boat, unable to suppress a sob. If I'd had a chance, I could have kept us together. I could track, I was good with animals, but I never had the—no. I didn't take the chance. The responsibility for this fell on me.

"Sad you won't get back to your coven in one piece?" Oss stepped out of the gloom, her rifle trained on me. "Poor little girl."

"You don't have to do this." I was so tired. "Everyone else is dead. We can go back, split the pay, and we'll never see each other again."

She grinned. "I don't think so." In the half-second she took to bring her rifle to bear, I unleashed a spell that wrapped itself around her head, coiling and spinning and muddling her senses. She frowned and blinked. I could see her eyes darting to catch things I could not see. "What was that?" She whipped her head around to find a sound I could not hear.

I crept sideways a few steps, and then broke into a run, wincing with the effort of sustaining the confusion on her. A roar stopped me short, and I whirled around. A large ape-like creature backhanded Oss and flung her crumpled body onto the beach. I dropped the spell as the creature followed her and smashed both of its fists down onto her chest. She sunk into the sand, and her arms and legs flew upward with the force of the blow, falling to the ground with a bounce. She did not move again.

I lifted a shaking hand to my forehead and started toward the boat when I realized I could hear nothing. No waves, no birds, no insects, no thunder, no rain. I stopped, eyes wide. I tapped at my ears with my fingertips and scanned the beach. The ape trundled back into the trees. Just across from the boat, at the tree line closer to me, stood three large dogs. The dogs were over a meter tall at the shoulder. The flashing lightning made them look as though their fur shifted from gray to black and back again. They stared at me.

Were these shadow hounds? The rumors said they were driven to fight evil. The rumors also said they could gather other creatures to work alongside them. What I'd said before was true: I had heard all the stories. I didn't necessarily believe them, but as we stared at each other, it occurred to me that none of the animals I'd seen had tried to hurt me. And the blow that had killed Random came from an axe, not a bandit.

I had the skills and the knowledge to make it here. I had just enough time to get back and get paid, if not only my share, then the whole payment. And then I could come back and make a home here. Study to my heart's content with no power struggles, no drama.

If my suppositions about the island and its inhabitants were correct.

NATURE IS A BITCH

- All right folks, it's that time again. Time to take a good hard look outside our windows and take stock of the wildlife. As usual, I put some feelers into the shadows letting people know that Jackpoint was looking for contributors for this article. I got the usual types of responses, but I got one so damn bizarre at first I thought it was a joke. And maybe it still is, but what can I say, the info is solid. So, without further ado, I give the virtual floor to none other than the man who insisted on writing this piece. I give you our very own Clockwork.
- Bull

- What?
- Glitch

- Excuse me?
- Netcat

- Aww, Clockywocky lovies the cuddly teddies?
- Slamm-0!

- I have no shame in admitting a lifelong interest in animals. However, as I'm about to show you, they are far from cuddly. Animals are serious business. Oh, and frag you all.
- Clockwork

SOCIAL ANIMALS

Allow me to start with the oh-so-cute household pets people keep. If, as is the case with many of us in the shadows, you come from the Barrens, or some other such SINless dumpster, then your experience with pets will be with the utilitarian sort. In the fringes of society—the abandoned tracks of wasteland where the SINless are pushed out to—people do what they can to survive, and they don't survive by much. If an animal is going to get a portion of food, it's going to need to earn its keep. Dogs are common, as even now they continue to earn their moniker of "man's best friend." Dogs are versatile and can be taught a variety of useful things. They can fulfill most roles in the security spectrum, serving as a threat deterrent, alarm bell, and security enforcement. They can find things and bring them to you. They can keep an eye on children and other dumb critters, such as livestock.

- "Children and other dumb critters, such as livestock." And you wonder why people don't like you.
- Pistons

- I don't wonder. People are stupid and can't face the reality I talk about. That's not my problem.
- Clockwork

If all else fails, you can also eat dogs. In the Barrens, that's what you call a pet. Now, you'll also typically find a certain amount of cats with the SINless, but by and large, these are feral creatures that are allowed to exist because they eat vermin. They aren't really pets. Try to get near one, and you'll see why. Occasionally, someone may get their hands on a kitten and domesticate it, but that is invariably a short-lived relationship.

In all cases, drones can do a better job than pets, but they are far more difficult to maintain. Pets require less maintenance and reproduce pretty much by themselves. You also don't get the same kind of satisfaction when you are drunk and angry and need something to kick.

- Now you're just being provocative, you piece of drek
- Pistons

- No I'm not. This is reality. I didn't make things the way they are in the Barrens, I'm just telling it how it is. But just for you, here's the optimistic side: A person beating a dog is usually too busy to beat his wife and child.
- Clockwork

Wageslave urbanites rarely have pets. This may surprise many of you, but being slave to a wage doesn't leave much free time to take care of other living organisms. Wageslave existence is finely optimized. The ninety-hour workweek is only bearable due to the wonders of simsense escapism. Corporate drones work, go home, slurp down a soy meal, then plug in for simsense before going to bed. They don't have time

for their own family members—usually living estranged existences from spouses and children, so how can they have time for some middling animal? Some do get pets, often at the (emailed) request of children, but such animals usually die due to malnutrition or general lack of care in short order. The cramped confines of wageslave apartment living also don't typically work for pets. Still, some people maintain fully automated systems designed to care for pets: automatic food and water dispensers, automatic cleanups drones, etc. All in all, though, I'm willing to bet any wageslave pet would, if it had the faculty to do so, wish to trade existence with a Barrens pet any day of the week, beatings and all.

Excluding those who live the corp-affiliated wageslave existence leaves that nebulous and ever-shrinking segment of the population that is neither wageslave, rich, nor totally poor: the independent lower middle class. Money is tight for this segment, but they have at least some degree of freedom. Pets kept for companionship are most common here. Where things are rough, it's often easiest to get a pet than try to maintain complex human relationships. People get angry and frustrated, yell at each other and blame each other for all sort of things. Maintaining human relationships is tricky. People generally just refuse to mold to your fantasies about them, gosh darn it. Pets, on the other hand, are too dumb to hate you and require far less maintenance than children. That suits a lot of people.

While the base perennial favorites haven't changed much—dogs, cats, fish, birds, and various cute rodents—the exact breed has. People like to pick a pet that "expresses their identity" and that kind of drek. Call it a cultural thing or call it playing to stereotypes, metahuman race often plays a factor.

Many elves will pick, for lack of better description, dainty little pets—fragile little beings that are nonetheless very pretty. Many elves pride themselves in establishing relationships with pets with complex care needs and fragile lives. They like to show they are "one with nature" and able to sustain animals nobody else can. Of course, Awakened pets are high on their list of creatures worth their time—things like Merlin hawks, bonzo parrots, blackberry cats, etc. And of course, elves don't like to cage or leash animals. They want people to believe the animal is their equal or whatever and stays with them out of pure love. Let me tell you, animal trainers make good money with elves and their pets.

Orks and trolls, tied as they are to a culture that values toughness, will pick the most dangerous freaking critters they can find and keep them as pets.

- I had a troll neighbor for a while who had a go at keeping a barghest. It was well-trained, I gotta admit. Stayed well-behaved, without incident, for years. Finally, my neighbor's neurons got fried on a bad Matrix run. It was a few days before anyone noticed. Barghest got hungry, barghest got out, barghest ate my other neighbor—an elderly dwarf woman. The rest of us got together and managed to put it down, but it wasn't a walk in the park.
- Red Anya

The rich and elite, for their part, are almost all pet owners, but there's a twist. As usual, they aren't playing the same game as everyone else. The wealthy have as pets fully gene-engineered critters. Now, don't get me wrong. Across the spectrum, almost every animal you will find in a pet store is gene-tweaked to some degree. Everyone knows about Evo GlowSnugs™, those adorable little downy-soft hamsters that glow softly in the dark. GlowSnugs™ are patented and Evo does not license the formula, so you can only get them from the megacorp. That's not really an obstacle since almost every pet store carries their pet food brands. Not all engineering is as tightly locked down or as complicated. Often, the gene tweaking is so common that just about anyone can do it. Almost every single cat or dog you can encounter has been tweaked to eliminate most allergens. Behaviors are routinely modified as well, so you can have dogs that have absolutely no chance of harming small children, or cats who do not need to scratch their claws.

But while little modifications to existing animals are commonplace, it's the creation of entirely new, custom animals that draws in the big bucks. For anyone that can afford it, the ultimate pet is a designer pet. Almost all of the top luxury goods houses, such as Vashon Island, Mortimer of London, and Louis Vuitton, have standing arrangement with bioengineering corporations. Every

season, their designers build new pets. These pets, naturally, tend to pair extremely well with that particular luxury house's seasonal apparel offerings. Just like clothes, the color (tint, hue, pattern), texture (e.g., fur, feathers, leathery hide), and shape (four-legged, two-legged, fly, doesn't fly, and so on) vary. And just like fashion, some will look classic and dignified while some are bold and attention-seeking.

The effect of age on the pet is another factor. The least creative houses will seek to preserve an exact look over the pet's lifetime. In such cases, typical lifespan is assumed to be no more than three years, and quite possibly less than one. The modern, cutting-edge fashion houses usually go with that strategy. Nobody wants to be caught dead with last year's look! The more traditionalist houses, on the other hand, design their pets to last a long time—decades, usually. What's more, the animal will be designed to weather the years nicely. In this fashion style, one can immediately spot a freshly made pet from one that has been maturing for twenty years. The older they get, the more dignified they look.

- I know Mortimer of London released a few years back a new, limited-edition, leather-hide animal that had the base profile of a greyhound with an equine, eagle-ish face. Only a set number were made. They say the animal will live a natural life of two-hundred years. Buying a brand new one set you back a cool one hundred and twenty-five grand. However, I have heard analysts project that in fifty year's time, that same animal, well cared for, could be worth around thirty million. So, they are not only prestige and fashion statements—they can be sound investments.
- Kat o' NineTales

Just like fashionable clothing, designer pets are produced in limited numbers for a particular season, and then never again. This thus means there is a thriving secondhand market in designer pets. And as is the case with certain acclaimed masterpiece purses or watches, some years the stars align and designers create something truly amazing, a timeless classic. Assuming the animal was endowed with a sufficiently long lifespan, owning such a masterpiece can make you the envy of everyone for years to come. Humans and metahumans being what they are, this means there is a thriving secondhand black market for such animals, which supports a thriving community of thieves. Some of these little luxury critters can fetch millions of nuyen. As with any asset worth that much, though, owners put in place security measures matching the investment to guard their pets.

- So a lot like fine art then?
- Beaker

- I see you know nothing about fine art. Owners of fine art—notably, the works that sell for millions—rent space in specialized vaults to store the pieces and hang reproductions on their walls. Nobody actually hangs the real thing up. So if you want to steal art worth that much, you need to hit the vaults. You can't exactly stick these pets in a vault, though. It entirely defeats the purpose. Unlike art, you can't just keep a reproduction around. So they are much, much more vulnerable to theft than many other kinds of other luxury asset.
- Ma'Fan

While most genegineered pets you will come across are brand-name luxury models, the truly creative can also custom design their own. These one-of-a-kind animals typically have little value to the outside world, but they are worth a lot to the people who build them. The pets serve as a sort of mix between surrogate children, personal expression, and art, and their eccentric owners pay small fortunes for their unique creations. The only use shadowrunners would have for these is to hold them as ransom, since nobody else will typically pay much for them.

LOW-DOWN DIRTY RATS

Now, pets are animals people *choose* to live with. But that isn't the only type of animal people coexist with. Ever since the Awakening, our position as dominant species on this planet has been mocked again and again. There are, of course, dragons, but I don't want to get into that right now, for the simple fact that dragons are exceedingly rare. I'm talking about the everyday critters that plague our cities, from the humble devil rat to the devastating rockworm. We have to face it: our city streets don't exactly belong to us anymore. Every nook and shadow, back alley, and abandoned park belongs to them.

In just about every city in the world, devil rats outnumber people at least five-to-one. *At least*. And that doesn't include all the normal little rats. Impervious to most pesticides, nothing has changed the face of urban life like the devil rat. Any sort of underground civic infrastructure maintenance effort must take devil rats into consideration. Workers must be armed or escorted. The entirety of our city's underground teems with the little bastards. They spread disease to any dwelling not sufficiently protected or that lets the vermin near food stores. Then there are those creatures too weak to defend themselves. The devil rats usually wait till the middle of the night to get to *them*. They'll start by nibbling a few toes. If that doesn't earn them retribution, it won't be long till they finish the job.

- Which reminds me: Never astrally project somewhere abandoned without some chummers watching your meat.
- Lyran

Aside from those universally loathed little fraggers, it is a scary and very real fact that larger predators roam the night alleys. There are the Infected, of course. From pack creatures like ghouls to solitary finesse hunters such as vampires, these creatures claim a significant amount of victims every day. Fortunately, the Infected scare people, so when nests are suspected, some sort of agency usually leads residents to send out an extermination squad. Still, shitty parts of town typically have recurring ghoul nest problems. Ghouls and their variants are typically more scavengers than hunters, though, as even in their glim, primal intellect they understand that people notice and care about missing bodies a lot less than they do about living relatives who go missing. The Infected often appear where fresh bodies tend to turn up a lot: gang turf-war flare-ups, locations near bad street docs, or places ravaged by disease. This, invariably, leads them to poor neighborhoods. On some occasions, the forces that generate dead bodies also encourage ghoul nests. Criminal syndicates are known to tolerate ghouls, as they dispose of bodies in ways the syndicates appreciate. That is an exception, though. In most cases, the Infected are typically seen as universally revolting, even by gangs, and there are typically bounties on nests.

The real problem, in my opinion, though, is that while everyone is busy being worried about the Infected, nobody has noticed the real and growing problem affecting our streets. The population of other feral urban predators has been steadily growing for the past few years. Gabriel hounds, mermaids, gargoyles, shadowhounds and other such urban critters have been increasing in numbers lately. As their numbers grow, so does the pressure for them to feed. Their boldness and aggressiveness has gone up, and so have the number of reported attacks. Many attacks are misclassified though,

or attributed to other factors. Gabriel hound attacks are often attributed to gangers or muggers, for example. But, make no mistake, the nighttime is becoming increasingly dangerous. Talk to anyone working the late shift, and you will hear the truth. Frag, talk to gangers. Increasingly, they are just as concerned fending off rival gangs as they are concerned about glowing eyes observing them in the dark. Even more so than always, beware dark alleys at night.

- Naturally, it's not the good neighborhoods where you face the risk of being mauled and eaten. Anything rated A and above is going to employ pest control companies to investigate and hunt down any feral predator sighting.
- Cosmo

- Yeah, but it's not like the critters know they are crossing into A-level turf. Critters don't last long once there is a reported attack, true, but *somebody* has to be that first reported attack, and it might very well be you.
- Stone

- By the way, masquerading as a team of large-game pest-control technicians is a great way to get around without arousing suspicion while wielding visible weaponry. You can be swinging around an assault rifle, and nobody is going to think your story is out of place if you convince them you're out hunting a shadowhound pack.
- 2XL

POLITICAL ANIMALS

While in most countries, the debate is what humans should do about their animal problem, in certain other countries, the discussion is what *animals* should do about their *human* problem. So-called Awakened nations are places where Mother Nature calls the shots and humans eke out a meek existence as second-class citizens. Let's take a look at a few of the most prominent Awakened states.

AMAZONIA

Surely the reigning queen of Awakened nations, life in Amazonia is likely hard to imagine for anyone from anywhere else. The interesting thing about Amazonia is that it is still home to a very high human population count overall, and specifically in the city of Metropole. Metropole is the biggest megasprawl in the entire world—bigger than Neo-Tokyo, bigger than the Rhein-Ruhr Megaplex, bigger than *anywhere*—with its population hitting near the two hundred million souls.

However, life in Amazonia, and even (or especially) in Metropole, is unique. Amazonian laws are formulated with the core principle of equal rights towards pretty much all life forms. Whereas any sane city will thank you for killing devil rats, feral dogs and all other creatures that can pose a threat to human life, Amazonia doesn't see things that way. Any living creature has as much right to exist as any other. In Amazonia, neighborhood ponds may be home to, say, alligator. And nobody is going to ask them to move. "Pest control" is called "murder" over there. People must respect and adapt to the existence of critters. Indeed, pilots navigating the skies between the many skyrakers of the Sao Paulo district of the city, famously the busiest airspace in the world, must not only contend with massive drone and piloted craft traffic, but also with thousands of critters flying all over the place. And, needless to say, no matter what your flight plan might indicate, a dragon *always* has right of way.

So, is that at all functional? Drek no. The end result is chaos, and people engage in widespread avoidance of the laws. Everything is a mess, and nobody reports it. Those alligators suddenly disappear one night. Planes and drones have mid-air collisions as they fail to recover from the wake of a dragon's passage. The fact is Amazonia is a very dysfunctional, disjointed system where government spokespeople—sorry, spokes*things*—may say the government respects and cherishes its law abiding citizens as much as anything else in nature, but the fact is that from top to bottom, sentient creatures call the shots and enforce federal laws. An animal's mind, even if it is sentient, will never be the same as a human's mind. They don't have the same priorities and don't think the same way.

Bleeding hearts may fret about protecting the environment from human domination. However, when the tables are turned, you can bet the critters do not care about protecting humans from the environment.

In any case, Amazonia has great PR with other nations (except Aztlan, natch). Go into any mall, and you'll find cuddly toys, t-shirts, beads, and other stupid drek officially licensed from the government of Amazonia. Kids grow up with cartoons such as *Defenders of the Rainforest* filling their heads with the notions that Gaia good; humanity bad. Many believe Amazonia to be a sort of paradise, a state of equilibrium we should all strive to achieve with Nature. Being pro-Amazonia is hip with a lot of youths looking to rebel, thinking they can change the fact they are about to become deadbeat wageslaves just like their parents.

- Horizon throwing in its chips with Amazonia during the Azt-Am Conflict certainly generated a lot of that commercial stuff. Lots of cute mascots, cartoons, and whatnot made their debut during that time. You'd be hard pressed to find a grade schooler that doesn't know *Jared the Jaguar*, or even a pre-teen that doesn't follow the hilarious antics of the *Teen Shifters*.
- Dr. Spin

NAGA KINGDOM

Dr. Lucy Shapiro published the definitive book on naga culture, titled *Angkor What?: My Year in the Naga Kingdom* in 2070, based on her prolonged period of embedment in the naga capital of Angkor Wat. Recounting her time spent there, Dr. Shapiro spoke of a highly social culture, where art and magic were privileged. She discussed their social mores; how they lived in extended family, how they married, and how they were schooled. Aided by humorous anecdotes, she recalled misunderstandings borne by cultural and the physiological differences between she and them. All in all, she showed the naga to be peaceful, innocent, and wise. While the naga had been around for some time, Dr. Shapiro's work did much to foster understanding between the heart of naga culture and the rest of the world.

Unfortunately, it may have been best if that hadn't happened.

While most of the world reacted with the short-attention delight of a toddler at the documentaries that followed—that is to say, initially squealing in delight at the marvelous snake-people, then immediately forgetting all about it when Stuffer Shack released a new flavor of beef-flavored jerky—it wasn't quite the same experience for the naga themselves.

While expatriate nagas had already been living in the wide world for years, and certainly while the leading elite of Angkor Wat—the Nagaraja and his diplomats—were plenty worldly, the masses remained pretty oblivious to life outside of what they knew. Ignorance was bliss.

In the exchange of cultures that occurred via Dr. Shapiro, many nagas came to know the world beyond their borders, including info about how the megacorporations coldly divide the world neatly into "resources to exploit" and "markets to dominate," wageslavery, the SINless and inherent social injustice, and so on. They discovered everything that makes our world the failed dreksack place that it is. Unsurprisingly, the nagas didn't really like what they learned.

The response to this malaise has been, recently, that numerous young nagas have been leaving Angkor Wat to join anti-corporate or pro-environment outfits. As they left with the naïve thought that they could help us poor humans, many of them initially joining peaceful groups like Equity or Sierra, Inc. Once they encountered the same frustrating marginalization and ignorance that all idealists encounter, they started drifting toward violent extremism or militant eco-groups. There, they are prized, if not outright worshipped, by the other the activists. Many nagas are Awakened, but even if they are not, they are typically very intelligent and able.

The net effect is certainly an increase in comingling. We see a lot more nagas than we ever used to, but increasingly they are being pre-judged as terrorists. The media are currently surfing this wave, going out of their way to point out naga involvement (or just suspected naga involvement). No matter who else was responsible for the planning and execution of an incident, if there was a naga somehow connected, you can bet the media will be talking about the naga, and just the naga.

- The newest tool of mass distraction. The corporate media focuses on the nagas, vilifying them, subtly playing up all kind of cultural prejudices as snakes being tricksters and devils. People focus so much on the devil-race coming out of the jungle to herald the end-times that they conveniently forget to think about *why* the nagas feel the need to risk their lives to stop the depredations of corporate ransacking.
- Ecotope

- You don't really need to sell the naga to us shadowrunners. They're all right in my book. We fight the same fight, really.
- Stone

- Give it a rest. Fighting the good fight, are you? Last I heard you commanded pretty high wages for your "good fight."
- Haze

- All right, the debate regarding the virtues or lack thereof of shadowrunning is not going to get solved tonight, and certainly not midway through an upload on fragging animals. A little focus, please?.
- Bull

- There certainly are more naga shadowrunners than ever. Graduating a skillset developed from eco or anti-corp terrorism into the shadows has always been common.
- Marcos

- If anyone is wondering, Mkono Wa Damu and Terra First! are getting the most naga recruits. Terra First!, a group that at least *tries* not to hurt people, attracts nagas because they want to help the world but don't really want to hurt anyone. Mkono, I would guess, are probably an easy cultural fit for the naga. The nagas revere the spirit world and Mkono's leadership is formed by the exiled spirits of Mt. Kilimanjaro. Seems like a match made in heaven. Or hell. Whatever.
- Cosmo

- I'm particularly worried about the few nagas that have been recruited by Logos, however. That group is still up to no good, looking for things that shouldn't be found. Nagas have a much easier time getting around jungles and unearthing secrets that should be left alone. This does not bode well.
- Elijah

YAKUT

Did you know that the formation of the Awakened state of Yakut predates that of Amazonia? Some say the emergence of Yakut was one of the scariest things world leaders had to deal with during those turbulent times. VITAS, goblinization, magic—those all have significant fear quotients. But a chunk of real-estate run by, like, talking deer and wolves, succeeding in declaring independence from one of the most powerful countries in the world—now *that's* something that gives power-hungry politicians nightmares.

Anyway, point is, Yakut is one of the oldest Awakened nations, though it is also probably the most unstable. While nobody knew at the time—and frankly, for a long time afterwards—the native Siberian people traded the shackles of Russian oppressions for the shackles of Awakened oppression. To supplant the massive power of the Russian armed forces, the Siberians trusted in an ultra-powerful spirit, who called herself Vernya, and her shapeshifter followers to help them fight.

Turns out Vernya's interest were not actually aligned with the Siberian people. She quickly reduced the Yakut to third-class citizens, with shapeshifters being the true power. Your run-of-the-mill dog has more standing than a human. Really, it's kind of what most sentient critters in Amazonia would *love* to see happen. A complete—crittercracy? Is that a word?

Russia never really swallowed the loss of part of their territory and continues, to this day, to perform nasty little border raids against the Yakut. They prod and poke for weakness, and destroy to destabilize. They push in propaganda to the people. The people really don't want to go back to Russia, but the shapeshifters don't trust them. So as the Russians raid, the Yakut follow and brutally check for possible traitors and informants. In both cases, the people suffer.

About a decade ago, elements within Yakut society finally rose up in open rebellion against the savage dictatorship of the shapeshifters. Not aligned with Russia and despising their Awakened overlords, they want a third path. So, as you can imagine, this lovely three-way frag-fest colors local opinion of critters. The citizens of nearby cosmopolite Vladivostok, Evo's hometown, are particularly weary of animals. Vladivostok plays stage to a covert little extended war between the various factions. Pro-Russians, pro-Awakened, and pro-rebels quietly dish it out in a battle to control the city, an important resupply point for the Yakut and the Yakut rebels (with the Russians basically messing with both sides equally). Vladivostok has had it up to their vat-grown gills with critters. Any of the common shapeshifter animal forms—wolves, bears, tigers, elk, etc.—are instantly viewed with suspicion and distrust. People are known to shoot such animals on sight. If the beast is truly a shapeshifter, it's unlikely to die from a single bullet, but the message is still pretty clear.

Within Yakut itself, of course, people may resent the shapeshifters, but they have few other options. Anyone who speaks out is torn to shreds.

Overall, the region has a pretty messed up love-hate relationship with critters. Those with business in that area should keep that in mind.

- A chummer from Vladi mentioned something about a Yakut Wolf King?
- 2XL

- Wolf shapeshifters are common grunt-class foot soldiers of the Yakut. Being pack animals, it's not impossible they have a sort of alpha male leader. Honestly, we know next to nothing about Yakut forces and how they operate. A so-called Wolf King may just be some sort of lieutenant (or general) in the Yakut power structure.
- Red Anya

- The Vladivostok Vory, which "Bloody" Otsana managed to consolidate under her sole leadership, has been showing signs of fracturing again. Rumors say that many Vory lieutenants never took to her leadership, and many have aligned themselves with Yakut forces against Otsana's explicit orders. The problem is growing beyond the point where Otsana can just execute disobedient lieutenants. The whole Yakut situation is threatening to tear the city apart.
- Mihoshi Oni

KILLING HUMANS INSTEAD OF ANIMALS

I already touched on this tangentially, but the world also has to deal with eco-terrorists. Now, I'm not making any excuses for the corporations that have raped mother earth and continue to do so. Even I can sometimes hear in the wind Mother Earth sighing at the ravages her children visit upon her, to quote a Terra First! screamsheet that made its way past my spam filters the other day. But between the life of some animals and the life of humans, I can pretty much recognize humans are more important. Not everyone sees things this way, though.

GreenWar and its offshoot Logos are perhaps the most infamous and largest, but there are hundreds of extremist terrorist organizations that have flatly decided that animal (and plant) life is more important than human life. And, seeing how we humans behave—in a way that threatens ecology—the only logical conclusion is to wipe out humanity. Pretty simple, really.

It is fairly easy to predict where one might encounter such extremist eco organizations. Any area of the world where there are both large tracts of nature and a large corporate harvesting presence, you will find eco-terrorists. You will, of course, also find them in the cities, since they like to do things like kidnap corporate bigwigs

responsible for harvesting projects and skin them alive. As such bigwigs are found in corporate HQs, which are found in cities. Cities are also full of sinners who must perish, of course, though conveniently cities are also places where one can acquire weapons to kill said sinners. So, I suppose, whether in a city or out in the great outdoors, one can equally run into pro-eco murderers.

There are a few specific hot points in the world worth mentioning. While the jungles of Amazonia do a pretty fine job protecting themselves against metahuman would-be polluters and despoilers, the vast megasprawl of Metropole is another matter. GreenWar has a special hard-on for the city, repeatedly attempting (and sometimes succeeding) in killing entire neighborhoods. As I understand it, claiming affiliation to GreenWar in Metropole is an excellent way to get instantly lynched. The teeming megaslums of Indian cities are also a favorite GreenWar haunt.

In the non-urban environment, you're likely to run into extremists in certain threatened areas like the Mojave Desert, the vast boreal forests of northern Quebec, and in general any part of the world where primary sector industry occurs. In such places, you also encounter many radical organizations. Most often, these will be the type of people that will sabotage machinery and kit, rather than specifically hurt people, to stop activities that endanger natural habitats.

However, the tactic of sabotage, at a strategic level, only makes operations more costly, but not impossible. At the very best, it can slow or delay projects. It can't stop them.

So the next step are the people who will kill people rather than let them hurt an animal, or an animal's habitat. We are rarely talking about the targeted death of one or two individuals, though. Again, people can be replaced. But the deaths of, say, an entire mining outpost—that sends a message. Even corporations have to think twice about restarting operations when that happens. Such extremist groups also don't always make logical sense: there have been many incidents of large-scale environmental destruction—such as chemical plants or nuclear power plants exploding and spilling their long-lasting poison for miles around—just to create human interdiction zones. The idea, I suppose, is that the environment will eventually adapt, even recover, but humans will stay away. Basically, they feel nothing can be worse than humans.

In today's world, there is little public sympathy for these kind of people. Corporations have done a pretty good job convincing the world that the eco-resistance fighters are in the wrong. Most people simply don't realize the savagery with which corporations plunder the land, and even if they sort of know, they largely don't care. Within more eco-friendly nations, like the NANs, the two elven Tirs, and Amazonia, views are only slightly different. Even there, people readily believe in each individual's responsibility to live in balance with nature, but eco-terrorists are seen as dangerous and childish. What they do simply isn't the right way. Plus, those places typically understand a place of *balance* with nature. Eco-terrorists push the scales *way* the other way. It goes back to one of the basic teachings from childhood—two wrongs don't make a right.

TOXIC RELATIONSHIP

The Awakening brought an entirely new perspective on "poor, defenseless animals." We already talked about your everyday monster animals that can and do hunt down and eat people and their impact on the world psyche. People had mixed feelings about the idea of the great white shark being a threatened species, back before the Awakening. They were big scary man-eaters, but that was countered by the fact their level of aggression was largely misrepresented, and many people knew it. But, let me tell you this: Nobody would shed a tear if megalodons went extinct overnight. It is a very real and very uncomfortable fact there are creatures out there that are just way too scary to exist.

The same phenomenon, sort of, happens in regards to toxic critters. Last century, if you wanted to sucker people into funding your non-profit organization, you showed them pictures of little birds covered in tar. Poor little bastards, they can't fly anymore! So sad. Fast-forward to today, and those little birds covered in tar are likely to mutate, grow rows of razor fangs, and shoot lasers from their eyes.

So, all at once, we can all kind of appreciate that toxic animals are our fault, kind of the manifestation of our sins. We pollute, and these deformed babies of nature show up, putting it in our faces that we fragged up. Our bad. However, on the flip side, those twisted creatures will attempt to kill you on sight. Kind of creates a problematic conflict of conscience. On one hand, we feel bad, but on the other, we're afraid of them. It's not like they're redeemable or anything; the only thing to do with a toxic critter is to put it down. Some deluded eco-nuts try to protect even toxics, but the toxic critters usually end up eating the would-be defenders of their rights.

In the public mind, toxics are basically a good reason to awkwardly smile and avert their eyes from difficult eco situations. They give corporations all the leeway to tell civilians to leave an area. The corps don't care: they'll put on hazmat suits, hire shadowrunners to take out the critters, and keep on working. All the better now that there is nobody to look at their activities anymore. In the media, toxics even allow the corps to take the high road: "It's not *we* that have wrecked this beach! *We* would have cleaned up the mess, honest! But that good-for-nothing *Gaia* is the one that messed everything up by creating these mutated monsters. Not our fault!"

Sounds kind of silly, but really, terrorists never garner public sympathy, and toxics are Mother Nature's little terrorists.

THE RAT RACE

We reach what is, in my opinion, the most relevant aspect of animal and human interaction: the almighty nuyen. Animals are a part of business, chummers. Animals *are* business.

Cattle are maybe the most obvious part of that business. Since the turn of the century, cattle farming has been in steep decline. It has simply always been true that raising and feeding an animal to be slaughtered is a net negative equation. It takes more food to raise an animal than you get out of eating it. For a long time, though, that didn't matter. In rich nations, food shortage wasn't a concern, and even given the losing equation, cattle growers made more money with meat than it cost getting the feed. In poorer countries, raising cattle was literally a losing equation even in financial terms, but apparently people were too stupid to realize that. Probably why they were poorer countries, incidentally.

In the past half-century, the economy of food changed. Corporations were able to dictate terms. Corporations preferred raising nice, stable, and universally edible crops like soy and krill. Advances in artificial nutrition allowed the corps to inject lab-grown nutrient, and advances in artificial flavors gave us the wide variety in flavor sauces we enjoy so much. Now even the most culinary-challenged wageslave can eat boeuf bourguignon every night by turning on the right setting of his Azteca MiracleCook 5600 model home food dispenser. Especially adventurous people can access their favorite celebrity chef's flavor sauce mix recipes and come up with truly original combinations their friends and family will rave about on their corporate social media platform.

The overall effect, of course, is an ever increasing reduction in the cattle business. Fewer and fewer

corporations—big or small—handle cattle. In most cases, the only way to remain viable is to reduce the amount of real-estate needed and increase operational efficiency. The most lucrative ranches stick their animals in cramped confines six rows high and plug their beasts into simsense feeds specifically designed for animal brains. The animals are placed on treadmills of sorts. Each cattle thus requires only a tiny bit of space, but the simsense keeps them from going insane (an act of generosity many smaller corporations cannot afford) and the treadmills provide exercise, which is good for muscle and thus good for taste quality.

Of course, the less meat there is, the more expensive it gets. An actual steak—heck, an actual burger made of actual ground beef—is a luxurious treat few people have or ever will taste. Then again, soy slop can essentially be made to taste fairly similar to steak, so paying two to three hundred nuyen for a piece of meat that tastes close to what you can eat at home for ten nuyen is pretty foolish.

- If you think a steak can be replaced by soy, you do not deserve to eat steak.
- Kane

- That being said, worldwide reliance on a handful of crops is extremely dangerous. At this point, only a handful of corporations—with Aztechnology subsidiaries dominating in this field—run the show. Decades of uneventfulness and the growing sense of the invincibility of genetically modified crops that science keeps improving are a *real* concern. Cattle, like pets, are genetically modified and cloned. This is advertised as a great way to ensure steady product quality. The fact that companies like Aztechnology license the exact same seeds and cattle to all of their subsidiaries across the entire world is kind of rock-bottom in terms of genetic diversity and robustness.
- The Smiling Bandit

- Yes. A fact certain groups hell-bent on ushering in the end of humanity have noted as a global weakness. Groups like Ta Makrinia and the Crying Masks, not to mention GreenWar and your run-of-the-mill lone wolf toxic shamans.
- Nephrine

- The fact that there was widespread famine in a modern and uber-controlled country like Aztlan following the Azt-Am war, and even in many modern cities following the effects of CFD, is very disturbing.
- Sunshine

- If you aren't stockpiling food, you're making a mistake. It is everyone's responsibility to prepare for the inevitable hardships that are coming. Relying on others is weakness.
- Stone

- Why would I stockpile food when I can just steal yours?
- Sticks

A BOUNTIFUL HARVEST

Raising cattle isn't the only way to make money from animals, of course. Another way animals contribute to the economy is by being rare and/or challenging to kill. Bounties and trophies are an important source of revenue in many places in the world. Quebec is the capital of the world in terms of bounty (and trophy) hunting. The government pays out bounties on almost everything, though sentient creatures haven't been on the list for decades. In Quebec's case, the angle is simple: the local economy gains more from the influx of bounty hunters than the government loses in paid bounties (morality doesn't factor at all, in case you're wondering). It's a sort of tourism industry at this point, though talisleggers, specialist tanners, exotic meat butchers, and restaurants have sprung up to deal with the secondary products stemming from so many killed exotic critters. Waste not, want not!

However, aside from Quebec, plenty more organizations have reason to issue bounties on things. Any place, or any group of people, plagued by troublesome critters will more often than not issue bounties. Throughout Africa, people ranging from village elders to big city politicians will hand out bounties for whatever local critter causes problems. Though in places like that, where every vagrant can afford to tote a gun, you can expect to have to earn your bounty. Things easy to kill get killed for free. Ever try to kill a juggernaut? Not so easy.

Corporations with designs on certain tracts of land will sometimes pay a bounty towards the eradication of some sentient beings. Tribes of troublesome munchkins, pixies, or centaurs are often quietly and discreetly wiped out, so that tracts of precious wood or whatever can be harvested. In such cases, the bounty is much more easily earned, so long as you're able to silence your own conscience with a fistful of nuyen.

- Fistful, you say? Hmmm.
- Slamm-0!

- Silencing your conscience for nuyen is the baseline job description.
- Cayman

As you can see, bounty hunting and pest control are pretty closely related. Bounty hunting implies you have to go out of your way to go kill an animal, while pest control typically means you would very much like the animals to stop coming to you. Wherever humans are found, pest control is a terrific business. It used to be that pests were basically just annoying creatures. In today's world, they can be absolutely fatal. Rats and devil rats carry deadly diseases. Until very recently, they commonly carried VITAS. We seem to at least have gotten that under control, but a single bite from a devil rat is still something that is likely to require hospitalization. Disgusting little insects now also carry the fear that they may in fact herald a bug spirit nest nearby. Ghouls will turn you into a ghoul. Those are all far more than annoying consequences. What's worse, it's a lot harder to kill things. Devil rats are absolutely immune to any poison we have tried throwing at them—and trust me, we have tried a lot of poisons. The only way to kill them is basically via mechanical means—shoot or stab them. That rule goes for almost all of the creatures that have an undesirable fondness for humanity and its byproducts.

However, some specialized companies deal with bigger problems. Much bigger. Megafauna is a real problem in many places. Aquacologies probably face the worst of it. Megalodons and krakens are a common issue quite capable of threatening entire installations, and their hundreds or thousands of inhabitants. One needs an adequate solution for such monsters. The field of pest control and engineering marry up, drawing up mega weapons or deterrents capable of keeping away creatures known to attack supercarrier battlegroups.

- You guys ever get a spider rat infestation?
- Sticks

- Eww. No.
- Pistons

- I came back from a run one day, you know, the kind of run that had taken me away from home for a couple of weeks. I heard a noise behind my fridge, so I move it to take a look. There was a hole the size of my fist, and the moving of the fridge must have excited them. Out pours hundreds of the fat, bloated, black little things. They climb over each other with their eight jabby little legs, crawl up the wall, on the ceiling. Fat little shits push each other, so they are falling everywhere. It's raining spider rats. They fall on their back with a wet, meaty thud and squirm like crazy before flipping themselves over and running in every direction.
- Sticks

- I think I'm gonna throw up.
- /dev/grrl

- What did you do?
- Stone

- I was in a sort of state of calm. Years of crawling in the mud and over corpses, so to speak, have left me with a sort of "special place" state. I'm sure you all know what I'm talking about. I shut down my brain and operated using my "chips are down" shadowrunner instincts. I went to see my landlord and asked if my doss was insured. It wasn't, of course. I took out a wad of nuyen from my last run's fat payoff and handed it to him without a word. Plenty, you know. More than enough to cover. Then I called in a few Halloweener chummers of mine. Told them to bring their gear. Then we nuked my place. Set the whole fragging thing on fire. The Halloweeners cackled gleefully. Me, I just stood there, watching, and shooting any of the little eight legged plump bags of meat that tried to escape the flames. I burned them. Burned them all. It was the only way to be sure. The only way I wouldn't see them in my nightmares.
- Sticks

SAVAGE KINGDOM

As with all things related to humans, sooner or later we need to talk about war. Animals have always played a part in armed conflicts. Ancient Gauls splattered pigs with tar and set them alight, causing them to rush squealing, mad with pain and terror, into enemy lines to break shield walls. Horses were perhaps the most important military development throughout the known world for centuries. During EuroWar II, the Kingdom of Morocco lent its expertly trained horde of demining monkeys to the Islamist forces. If you are wondering about that one, the monkeys were not expertly trained engineers, no. They demined the *other* way.

For much of human history, man has found creative uses for animals. War has always required bravery and determination, but every man has a breaking point. We are capable of imagining what can happen to us—that's the problem. Animals are dumber. They can be trained to ignore the warning signs that they are in a perilous situation and thus remain calm where a man would not. Sometimes they are just too plain stupid to realize they are in danger, and sometimes you don't really care if they do. As such, they make great fodder, beasts of burden, or even shock troops.

With the advent of motorized vehicles and, more recently, drones, animals lost a lot their uses. I said a while back that animals were still found with the SINless a lot because while drones are generally better, the poor can't always afford them. When it comes to armed forces, budgets are generally not an issue. Why ride a horse when you can ride a motorcycle? Why send a carrier pigeon when you can send a stealth drone?

Nevertheless, animals continue to be a part of warfare. First of all, some animals still make better, or at least equivalent, guards to drones. The biggest advantage is that you can't hack a standard guard animal. Secondly, some (incredibly stupid and likely soon to die) people hesitate at killing animals. Sometimes, a hesitation is all you need. There are still surprisingly large amounts of tender-feely bleeding hearts who don't want to hurt the poor, innocent animals. There are exactly zero people who will feel bad shooting a hunk of metal and circuitry.

There is also a sort of instinctual factor. Ever since our extremely distant ancestors on the African plains learned to run and jump up a tree at the sound of growling, we all carry an ingrained genetic fear of frothy mouthed, growling, teeth-blaring barking things. Drones are deadly, for sure. Deadlier than most animals. But we don't instinctively fear them. That fear counts for something—it makes a good deterrent.

- In the same vein, lots of people still have totally bonkers, lose-control-of-yourself fear of certain animals. Like snakes, spiders, rats. And then some have overpowering superstitions, like Islamic martyrs and pigs. The judicious application of these animals can do marvels to get someone to talk about something they don't want to. Works better than breaking fingers most of the time.
- Haze

Of course, Awakened critters can provide an angle in combat that drones simply can't. Certain paracritters can engage Awakened combatants or intruders, something no drone can do. Even if they can't engage astral intruders, all paracritter powers are exceptionally powerful. The paralyzing howl of a trained barghest provides highly effective non-lethal options. The fiery breath of a hellhound dumped into a DMZ (or Zero-Zone) will ensure nobody crosses that demarcation alive.

Awakened or not, though, the field of enhancing animals continues to be a thriving one. As cyber and biotechnology evolve (and, recently due to CFD, devolve), the limits of what can be put into a person must be carefully explored and managed. You put a piece of ware that drives a human test subject insane, or leads to his death, and you have a problem. Do that to an animal, and nobody even blinks. Critter augmentation is a savage field with next to no regulations. The results of this wild science create fantastic beings that merge the best advantages of both drones and animals.

Critters native to an area of military operation can be taken and jammed full of sensors to act as discreet spies. Or, they can be loaded up with area bombs to act as assassins. Certain massively powerful, but otherwise untrainable paracritters can be outfitted with mind-control devices, making the impossibly hard-to-control monsters into fully controlled monsters.

- Hmm. Has anyone ever created a cybered megalodon?
- Plan 9

- No. Mainly because nobody has ever captured one alive.
- Sounder

- Yet.
- Thorn

- I'll give +200 odds on the world seeing a cybered megalodon in the next five years! No offers under two grand. Place your bets here!
- /dev/grrl

- Jeez, dev, it just keeps getting more esoteric with you.
- The Smiling Bandit

- You want some of that action or not?
- /dev/grrl

- Yeah, yeah, put me in for five k on the plus side.
- The Smiling Bandit

Awakened nations of course make use of animals of war in a whole other way. Typically, the roles of critters and humans are reversed. The Yakut use humans as nothing more than bait and fodder against their enemies; the real soldiers are the myriad shapeshifters that abound over there, supplemented by fantastic beasts like the wooly mammoth. Whereas we common mundane chumps have to stick computers in the head of critters to get them to do our bidding, Awakened nations seem to have a native ability to get animals to do their bidding naturally. Well, most likely they control them with magic and pretend that all of Gaia acts of one mind just to make us feel cheap, but whatever. The end effect is that Yakut mammoths stampeding toward Russian armor is a common occurrence. In Amazonia, wyverns patrol the air, acting as interceptors. During the Azt-Am war, everything was hostile. Whatever means these so-called Awakened nations have, they are able to control nature to create organized and effective animal-based militaries, the likes of which the world could only fantasize about prior to the Awakening. Now, military strategists have to design dogfighting doctrine centered on how to take down a dragon in aerial combat. Most advancing militaries kill any and all living creatures on sight, just to be safe.

After all is said and done, critters bring a level of uncertainty to battle plans. That is truly their biggest advantage. Surprise and deception are a warrior's best weapons, and trained military critters usually serve well in both capacities.

THE WILD CARD

For those with the eyes to see it, the most recent development affecting the animal kingdom is CFD. The base motivation of the Monads remains somewhat unclear. Their spokespeople claim a high and mighty William Wallace-esque cry of FREEEEEEEDOOOOOM, but really, that kind of sounds like bulldrek to me. We have to look no closer than our own Plan 9, who has not indicated an especially urgent need to blast off to Mars. If you ask me, they kind of like our bodies. Metaphorically, it seems to me like they stole a bunch of Eurocar Westwinds to make their getaway, but then kind of took a liking to nice, leisurely drives. Doesn't seem to me like they are exactly of one mind on the subject matter.

Case in point are CFD-infected animals. The brain of an animal is fundamentally different than that of a metahuman. It simply wouldn't be possible to load a human mind into an animal's brain. The result would likely go insane pretty fast. But AIs don't have brains. They never did. Their thought patterns were originally modelled after our own, following principles of logic and reason. But when the AIs went rogue, their thought patterns changed. They are no more human-minded than animals. So using CFD nanites to imprint themselves into animal brains is surely, for quite a few AIs, a perfectly pleasing experience. We *assume*, in our ever present self-absorbed ways, that the majority of AIs would want to be in our minds, to walk around in the meat of the most interesting, most superior species on the planet. What if the bulk of AIs prefer living inside animals?

Frankly, there is next to no data, public or in the shadows, in regards to CFD infection among animals. We know it can occur. But what are the consequences? What is the extent of the metamorphosis the CFD nanites can bring to the animal's mind? Does the AI go completely, mindlessly feral? Does the animal become sentient? It is likely both are possible. Just as we are determining that there are multiple strains of CFD and multiple states of sanity within the AIs infecting people, we are likely to see the same types of patterns in animals.

However, with us people, the Monads cannot escape close inspection. They are our enemies. Perhaps we stay our hands and observe them, not outright declaring genocidal war upon them, but CFD life is anathema to metahuman life. They *have* to murder us to be born and live. We are not friends. We observe them. Closely, very closely. Every mutation, every weakness.

But what of packs of wild animals out there, bearing CFD infection? We have no idea what they are doing. I have heard stories, though it is hard to separate the chaff from the wheat. I have heard people tell of packs of animals living in the wilds in communities, transforming their environments to suit their needs. I've heard people describe far too many cases of animals behaving nothing like they should. I've heard different types of animals working together to drive off intruders. Ever see a piasma and a greater wolverine work together? No, no you haven't, because that's not supposed to ever happen.

There is nothing to stop them out there. Nothing to stop them evolving. What if that is their plan? Retreat out of sight, get their drek together, then hit us with a new, more targeted, more evolved wave of infection. I don't get paid to think about apocalyptic scenarios, so I'm just going to leave you with that final warning: Don't think you can predict anything about any animal out there. Be wary of every animal.

- Earlier, we were talking about the unexplained rise in urban critter attacks. Do we know if these are CFD critters?
- Axis Mundi

- The corps might know something about it. I was in a NeoNET host foundation the other day and caught a glimpse of a whole slew of datafiles that seemed to pertain to tests performed on such animals—the type of experimental tests usually reserved for detecting CFD. Foundation runs being what they are, it wasn't data I had come there to get, so didn't take the extra risk to go grab it. So all I can say is, yeah, the corps might know something about it, but if so, they aren't making anything public.
- Pistons

RAT POISON
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UNTAMED SECURITY

- I'll be honest, this was kinda tricky to pull together, and I had to call in a favor or two, because no one person in my network could cover all the bases. We've got DangerSensei drawing on his experience in security design to talk about the tactical deployment of animals. Then we have newcomer Rainbow explaining the logistics behind them. Finally, Lacey, a freelance breeder and trainer, offers his insights into how best to take down the creatures in question.
- Slamm-0!

TOOTH AND CLAW

POSTED BY: DANGERSENSEI

I get a kick out of runners talking drek in bars. Zero-Zone this and auto-turret that, and always the talk about the great big guns the rent-a-cops brought to bear, all for naught. They talk about the drones they hacked and the cameras they looped and the wagemage they geeked, and they laugh. But they never laugh about the animals. Hell, they rarely talk about them. The guy with the burn scars, he knows what it's like to feel the breath of a hellhound. He's not laughing. The elf with the haunted look at the end of the bar, she saw her friends torn apart by trained hawks with talon caps and augmented beaks. She's not laughing. You know what the most telling thing is, though? That so few stories are told at all. Makes you wonder how many runners walk away from an encounter with Corp's Best Friend.

Let's talk about the mechanics of such a critter.

MONEY

The first thing any corp thinks about is expenses, and so should you. They want the maximum return for the minimum investment, with as little ongoing overhead as possible. When it comes to security, there are two basic types: static and dynamic. A static defense isn't moving, cannot pursue, and is almost always automated. These include everything from razorwire and maglocks to autoturrets and Neuro-Stun gas. Dynamic security is capable of adjusting to the needs of the situation, generally through greater mobility, but also flexibility of equipment, tactics, and most importantly, independence. A wall is just a wall; once you climb it or bust through it, it's done all it can do. A security guard, on the other hand, is going to use that wall. He's going to work with other guards to pin you in, take you down, and lock you up. And even the dumbest guards above minimum-wage token night watchmen have at least half-a-dozen tactical plans in their heads. That's just the nature of the game.

A static defense is cheaper, by far. You install it, and after that, there's just basic upkeep and the occasional maintenance and upgrade. The electric bill isn't even affected by ferrocrete walls and monofilament wire. Corps love static defenses.

A dynamic defense is more expensive. You have to train it, equip it, pay it, insure it, and so on. A security guard's death can have surprisingly handsome payouts in death insurance for the grieving family, if the corp is honest (which happens, I swear!). And then it takes so much time to find another applicant, screen them, train them, arm them—the expenses stack exponentially over time. For all that runners like to make fun of corp sec, they represent a significant investment of nuyen and time, and given how many runners get their heads blown off fighting them, it's clear the investment is much better than just static defenses.

Why not go a step further, though? Drones are dynamic, right? Absolutely! And they cost a *lot*. And if you want them to do a half-decent job instead of ending up as expensive mobile turrets, you have to hire a rigger. Which is just like that guard I just mentioned, only much more expensive, because he needs cyber and greater training. How about a mage? Oh, mages are special for all the right reasons. They have exclusive access to the astral. They can fling spells, scout at the speed of souls, summon, control, and dismiss spirits, maintain warding—it's a shame they are so damn rare! The density of magic in the shadows is not mirrored by the corps, who have to spread their magical assets that much farther afield. Magic, and mages in particular, are about as expensive as security gets. And the Matrix ... well, that's not what we're here to talk about. Not yet, anyway.

Which brings us back to critters. Where do they fall on the static-dynamic scale? Somewhere in the middle.

Biological security assets represent tactical wildcards, dead zones, and compensatory measures. They fulfill physical, magical, and even digital security needs at a much lower cost to maintain.

Consider this: A guard dog doesn't ask for pay. He doesn't understand reward beyond food, praise, and affection. He doesn't question his loyalty. If he dies, no one is going to look for a payout. And there's a whole kennel of other dogs like him to replace him, either cloned or more likely just bred. Training is relatively easy and definitely cheaper overall than a guard, and the dog can learn pack tactics, including working with those same guards. Hell, they can be all the more effective if you're willing to outfit them with armor or other gizmos, or even cyber, if you're a mean bastard with cash to spare.

So, lets stop looking at this like a corper would, all cost/benefit ratios. Let's start thinking like a security spider, so you can start thinking like a successful shadowrunner.

DEAD ZONES

The biggest, most common variable for biologicals is whether they can play well with others. Animals, whether mundane or possessing paranormal abilities, may have any number of factors which make them incompatible with metahuman security, other biologicals, or the operation of the facility which they are set to defend. In some cases, this comes down to mindset. For others, it's just a part of their nature.

Let's consider a few examples.

The standard security dog is a fantastic choice, overall. It's been acting as a metahuman companion since before recorded time. Dogs train well, have excellent endurance and loyalty, and have the enhanced senses to detect stealthed or undercover threats, such as explosives, astral cloaking, or spilled blood. Moreover, on a genetic level, dogs and humans are comfortable with each other. Let's say this dog is part of a security detail for a lab of some kind. The scientists may be wary of the mutt, an especially finicky one may complain about their shed hair getting into the ventilation, but overall no one is going to make a fuss about the presence of a dog around the halls. It adds a touch of warmth, a little security. It's as much a boost to morale as anything else.

Let's take that same dog and replace it with a hellhound. Now it's got the same basic intelligence as any other dog, and being dual natured, it can attack both mundane and Awakened targets like spirits and astrally projecting mages. And with fire, no less. This isn't doing any favors for the staff, however, since that fire can be a hazard to the facility. Now you have to make sure it is only used in a limited deployment in zones where it won't do more damage than good. And then there is the cost of the creature. Hellhounds are hardly cheap, and their loss can represent a significant setback for security budgets. Their diet, too, is more exotic, and requires higher overhead on a regular basis (zebra meat is a particular favorite, as I understand it). The kennel needs fireproofing. The handlers' armor does too. Costs add up, and after a while, the old security dog starts to look better.

Going a step further, you have cockatrices. These ugly birds are rather hard to train at all, and their handling requires a very particular touch. You can't expose the staff to them, unless you want to spend every day working off the paralysis from a touch of their tail feathers. Maintenance is a nightmare, overhead is exorbitant, and deployment is highly specialized. In general, they might be let loose in a place that is locked down or otherwise meant to be unoccupied for a while. A warehouse, perhaps, or a tightly sealed area. This is a Dead Zone. Its use is almost exclusively for security purposes, and it can be an enclosed area, unmanned storage, or a sprawling natural area. Larger indoor areas and outdoor zones are much more common here, since a small area can easily be flooded with gas and the like. It cannot be used in conjunction with any staffed area, which makes their use limited, at best.

The best example I can offer is the prized basilisk. These Awakened reptiles are almost as long as some trolls are tall, and they'll eat whatever they catch. They're surprisingly fast, but they don't need to be, because of their inherent paranormal ability—they can petrify creatures with a look. Obviously this is a very, very useful power, but you can't train them to not look at site personnel. Their use justifies the creation of dead zones,

though I have seen attempts to create remote shutters for their eyes. One rather ingenious design placed them behind electrochromic plasteel in a hallway. During normal base operation, the windows were opaque. If intruders were believed to be in that area, the plasteel became transparent and the reptiles got a good, long look. A bit expensive, but very effective.

COMPENSATORY MEASURES

There are some things that normal security guards and static defenses simply cannot do, and one of them is astral security. The shadows have more than their fair share of magical assets, proportional to the corps' need for security, and the corps know it. It becomes necessary to find ways to plug those gaps, however, wherever and whenever possible. Sure, a security mage can maintain a cadre of bound spirits, and those spirits can be set to defend specific zones, but every runner knows you geek the mage first. So how do you supplement that mage?

A dual-natured biological can fill in rather impressively. Let's take a look at the hellhound again. Its bite and burn will do quite nicely against astral intruders, even inflicting lasting damage against the rare regenerating enemy such as a shapechanger or vampire.

A more mundane (but in my opinion much more interesting) example is aerial security. Since the advent of commercial drones, hawks and eagles have been bred to bring down unauthorized drones. For a more impressive display, rocs, blood kites, eyekillers, and even the odd stormcrow flock can guard the skies with a number of abilities at their disposal. Their upkeep is reasonable, and they can be released as a periodical patrol or when enemies are detected. I've seen them outfitted with

basic surveillance gear to become mobile sensors that are harder to hack and lack the predictability factor of programmed patrol routines, or sent en masse to tear apart parachuting infiltrators and invaders. If they get killed, their breeding is relatively easy and inexpensive. Training takes time, but it's an art as old as falconing, and techniques have only gotten better in the millennia since we started doing it.

Aquatic environments can also benefit from the selective placement of biologics. I know of at least one undersea facility that maintains a population of abrams lobsters to deter infiltration.

It also pays to remember flora as well as fauna. The right creeper vine in the right place can be poisonous or set off an astral alarm, or maybe just insulate an area from astral intruders. Rumor has it some facilities use such horrors as sangre del diablo or other carnivorous vegetation, but I personally think that's both overboard and a bit melodramatic. The fact that they can lure prey in ways that go beyond any known method of training means they pose as much a risk to security and staff as well as intruders, unless you plan to make it a dead zone.

As an example, I once had the opportunity to examine the security measures of a certain nameless corporation's facility used for the containment and study of insect spirits.

- COUGHAresCOUGH
- Slamm-0!

- Wow, figured that one out all by yourself, huh?
- Clockwork

They had the challenge of designing a security setup that was much like a standard prison: keeping the specimens in, but also keeping external raiders out. Obviously they had more than the usual degree of Awakened personnel on staff, but when bugs break out, they don't mess around. And with their ability to infiltrate many places, they couldn't take any chances.

Enter the wyrd mantis, a 1.7-meter-long Awakened praying mantis that just *loves* the way bug spirits taste. These mantises can't be trained, but they could be released in the event of a breakout and set off on random patrols. The guards and staff used their pheromones, much like Petite Brume grenades, to mask themselves from the mantises' appetites. I'm told the measure was incredibly successful, stopping two escapes and one infiltration by a good merge. As a bonus, the pheromones kept the bugs afraid, too. Were they a pain in the ass to breed and keep? Absolutely. But they filled a critical role so effectively that it was more than worth the expense.

- Note to self: Be sure to keep some mantis musk on hand.
- Sticks

- Why? You're not a bug, are you? ;)
- Snopes

- Wait, *are you*?
- Plan 9

- *sighs*
- Sticks

- This is really all we think about anymore whenever Ares comes up, isn't it? Bugs and guns.
- Bull

- It's practically their corporate motto.
- Mr. Bonds

TACTICAL WILDCARDS

The real advantage of biologicals is that they change the nature of the battle. They introduce new variables into the tactics needed to survive an assault and are more often than not underestimated. Most runners just don't respect the intelligence, speed, and ferocity of a well-trained mastiff or Doberman.

The most interesting element that gets overlooked, in my experience, is the psychological aspect they bring to the fight. Shadowrunners, filled with bravado and confidence, don't think anything can scare them. They fail to recognize that metahumans evolved from herbivores. We were once the prey, long ago, and somewhere in our genetic makeup, we know it. We can be cut, shot, even burned and keep our cool, but deep in our genes we remember what it was to run from a fast, hungry creature. We fear the idea of being torn apart and consumed as instinct, and once we feel pursued, or worse, the weight of a creature on top of us, we panic. And panic is a quick way to die in a combat scenario.

Corporate security (and therefore shadowrunners) are more likely to look at animals for their guaranteed, measurable abilities. A barghest trains rather well and can induce terror into its victims. Gloaming owls are their aerial equivalent and are positively lethal to enemy mages with their ability to blind foes while inducing concentration-breaking fear. Volleying porcupines can hamstring enemies as well as mark them with their musk (I've seen guard dogs trained to seek anyone marked thus, and panicking the porcupines is as simple as activating a tiny radio shock collar so they'll start shooting at anything that moves). Gomatia represent an ... unorthodox kind of security animal, but corp sec keeps using them, if only because they are incredibly cheap and can hamper enemies. Certain corporations have been working to breed Cerberus hounds for their excellent uses.

STREET-LEVEL BEASTKEEPING

Now, it's important that I mention street beasts. Corporations hardly have the market cornered when it comes to biologics. From junkyard dogs to devil rats, the sprawl finds its own uses for animal aid.

You might not think of Awakened animals when you consider pets and security, given their exotic abilities and needs and the limited resources of noncorporate entities, but there are quite a few examples. One of the most notable is the quicksilver mongoose, which is a natural when it comes to killing devil rats. They respond well to little gifts and can become quite protective of an adopted family. When you think about how many kids die from devil rat bites and the resulting disease, it's not much of a surprise. Along a similar vein, both shadowhounds and talis cats have been known to adopt masters. While shadowhounds are stealthy, pack-minded, and more than capable of taking down metahuman prey, they have been known to protect metahumans as well and can sometimes become unofficial mascots of a neighborhood watch. Talis cats are far more solitary, sometimes picking a human for whatever capricious reason a cat might, and spending most of their time curled up purring in their lap. Later the same night, they leap out the window and take down a ganger for dinner. You'll never train it, so it's useless to a corporate security team's needs and procedures, but for the lucky sucker who has one of these watching out for them, they are a godsend.

- He ain't kidding. I used to run with a guy who thought intimidation was the same thing as diplomacy. Never bothered with the soft touch. He starts getting rough with an old cat lady in Redmond, and before we can tell him to back off, one of the lady's cats has grown to the size of a panther and is tearing his throat out. Serves him right, but I'll never look at old women with cats the same way again.
- Hard Exit

- I ran across a family of gomi rats, scavengers in one of the big junkyards in Boston who had a partnership with a local nest of bandits, those big raccoons with the opposable thumbs. The critters would bring back shiny bits for food. When they got their trade, I swear they were communicating about how it was to be split up. I'm not entirely convinced they aren't sapient.
- Ma'fan

While security use is limited by resources, some groups manage to maintain paranormal biologics. Of particular fame are the 405 Hellhounds in the Seattle Metroplex, the leader of which traditionally keeps a pair of loyal hellhounds as both mascot and enforcement.

- You also see some unorthodox uses of animals that don't have a practical application in corp security. I once saw a gang of con men use an incubus in their schemes. They kept it in a cage and would pull all kinds of scores, like supposedly kidnapping someone and then using the incubus as "proof" the hostage was there, or luring marks into dark alleyways for a quick mugging.
- Jimmy No

- A Red Dragon Red Pole in Hong Kong was known for her "Hell of Gnashing Teeth" punishment. She kept a pit full of captured devil rats, sealed up with a door. You didn't pay debts on time? You went in the pit, usually with plenty of witnesses. Dead folks don't pay, but scared ones sure do. I couldn't eat for days after seeing that.
- Red Anya

ENHANCEMENT

While paracritters don't take to augmentation very well, a standard animal can be implanted with almost as many cybernetic or bioware upgrades as metahumans, in some cases more. Dermal armor and upgraded teeth, claws and talons are easy and cheap, while muscle implants and adrenal pumps can make biologics fast and lethal. Cybereyes can make the animal a roving camera, while implanted tasers add an extra punch to attacks. And for the complete package, a STIRRUP implant means a fast, droned animal. This is exceptionally expensive, but the end product is often worth it. The biologic becomes part of the security network, retaining all of its instincts while being under the precision guidance and control of a rigger. These biodrones were the hot new item a few years ago, but with the advent of CFD, they've seen a significant drop-off in popularity. Nobody wants a cyberhawk that hacks your bank account and then literally flies away.

The big-ticket item that's making its mass-market debut are warforms, genetically engineered animals designed with security in mind.

- This is hardly new. I've run across spliced animal security since the sixties.
- Hard Exit

- Ah, but that's not the exciting part. While genetic engineering has allowed for select alterations and the occasional stable chimera to be made in the past, we were still cataloging interaction data and refining processes and technology. Now we have what was once referred to as "tinkertoy genetic engineering." A sufficiently stable creature can be viably produced to the customer's specifications without too much worry of an unstable end result.
- The Smiling Bandit

- If you can do that with animals, why not metahumans?
- Hard Exit

- Because metahuman genetics are more complicated, to say nothing of the availability of cataloging sources. Genetic research was once forbidden on humans, forcing scientists to start their work with plants and, when and where law permitted, animals. Human testing only began in earnest with the rise of megacorporations.
- KAM

- Wouldn't the rise of Matrix technologies have sped up research?
- Lyran

- Sure, but the Awakening threw everything we thought we knew right out the window. Some of the data (most, even) turned out to be just as viable as before, but there were many years wasted trying to prove the false hypotheses, like that humans and trolls are not genetically similar or even compatible, despite all practical evidence to the contrary. What's more, magic and pollution both work to cause mutation which so far cannot be accounted for scientifically. We might have better luck if there were more awakened geneticists, but there's probably no more than fifty to a hundred of them worldwide.
- KAM

- Ooooh, I know who I'm extracting for Christmas!
- Rigger X

The ability to custom-design security biologics will almost certainly be a sweeping change, creating creatures that are idealized for a specific location and purpose. I predict the two most popular sellers will be the ghost hound and the bioreceptive trait. These two promise to offer astoundingly affordable astral security and remarkable flexibility, respectively.

- What, no details?
- Red

- Found it later in the genetics section. Guess ol' Danger is just trying to point us in the right direction.
- Ethernaut

- Bioreceptivity proved to be something of a blushing discovery for geneticists. For years we wondered why animals did not take to cybernetic reconstruction as well as the more complicated metahumans who use it commonly. When we realized the mistake, it was embarrassingly simple.
- KAM

- So what was it?
- Butch

- That animals are more in tune with their natural state, particularly physicality, and modifying them after the fact isn't something they are equipped to deal with on a psychological level.
- The Smiling Bandit

- Yes, exactly. By altering certain genetics in both the brain and nervous system for better acceptance, we've found animals can take quite well to augmentation, particularly if we use scaling limbs as they grow older, to keep them acclimated to the process.
- KAM

- Scaling limbs?
- Lyran

- She means they lop off their limbs when they are pups, then replace them with gradually larger ones as they grow older. The smaller ones are kept for secondhand installation in the next generation of cyber animal.
- Butch

- That is horrifying.
- Netcat

- If it's any comfort, it's much simpler to install bioware into animals at a young age. It grows with them, which cuts down on procedure costs, and the animals grow up enjoying greater abilities without thinking there's anything unnatural about it.
- Lacey

- I never have understood why people get so sentimental over animals.
- Glitch

- I was starting to think I was the only one.
- Clockwork

- I'll work to change my mind, just to avoid the association.
- Glitch

THE MOST LOYAL EMPLOYEE

POSTED BY: RAINBOW

- Finding someone to write up the rearing process was a bit of a hard find. I had to put out the word, and Red linked me with a ShadowSEA poster by the name of Rainbow. Seems she's got a funny knack with critters, both bringing

them up and taking them down. So I've given her limited access to give us some background on how this affects us in the shadows.

As a side note, I had to design a new audio codec for the speech-to-text translator. She's got a Tír brogue so thick it sounds like her mouth is full of taffy.

- Slamm-0!

- OYM OIRISH, YEH FEKKIN TOS- (Post terminated by User: Bull)
- Rainbow

- I'm sorry, that was just so, so loud. I'll load up the codec for your use here, Rainbow.
- Bull

- She's Irish.
- Red

- I understand her perspective entirely.
- Picador

Hello, JackPointers! I've heard a lot about you guys, and it's really an honor to be posting here for you tonight. I've been given to understand you want to know all about how the corps bring up their wee beasties. It's not just going out in the forest with a tranq gun, that much I can guarantee you! And from experience, no less. No, making the most of your animals takes time, and it all starts with finding what my boyfriend would refer to as "The Right Stuff."

- Wait, Rainbow dates that organ snatcher, Zippy Toetag, right? How a guy that nice can have a job that creepy is beyond me.
- Slamm-0!

- Where the hell are these kids coming up with these street names, these days?
- Bull

- Like you're one to talk?
- Slamm-0

- Guys, this is about to snowball quick. Like a glass house full of stones, I think we should all just walk away right now.
- Sunshine

EGG HUNT

The first thing anyone needs is the right pedigree. Nothing so fancy as a showdog, but—well, I take that back. It's really about what you want your new bloodline to be able to do. Dogs are the most common and easiest example, so I'll go with them. You've got all kinds of breeds of dogs, yeah? But not all are equal at all tasks. Some have great noses, some have better hearing or eyes or speed. Hunters of antiquity (and some today, even) would use a variety of hunting hounds working together to track, harry, and take down prey.

So you have to figure out what you want, so you know what you're looking for. Simple, right? Not so much. Because The Right Stuff is a known quantity. It has value, believe me. Rich folk track the bloodlines of hounds and horses and more, and the term horse trading is literal, and there's big bucks in it, too. A male is generally worth more than a female because a female can only produce so many young before wearing out, while a male can go the distance, as it were. Of course, modern science makes it easy enough to harvest eggs and sperm artificially, but you'd be amazed how old school some of these people get about their hobby. I've made some very good nuyen snatching the right beast and knowing where to sell it.

- You have to make sure you can provide medical corroboration to go with the animal if you want full pay, too. Breeding papers, medical workups, gene reads, whatever it takes to prove this is the right animal and not just a pet-store stand in. Plenty of work for the decker here, either getting those documents or forging them.
- Zippy Toetag

- Oh for fuck's sake, are we letting *everyone* in here now?!
- Clockwork

- Since I know how much it pisses you off, I might just do that.
- Slamm-0!

The jobs might be called datasteals, but more often they're extractions. Sometimes you're stealing a designer chimera from an heiress' penthouse, other times you're raiding stables in the California Free State. Still other times you're hitting a zoo in San Diego, or a nature reserve in Salish, or the wilds of Amazonia, or the depths of the Caspian Sea. It's hard to put an exact title on the run, because it takes you wherever the beastie is, and animals are in more places than metahumans, even today.

THE BIRDS AND THE BEES

Now, I suppose you could capture or buy every single beast you want for the jobs you've got, but that's not very practical, and it's expensive. More than that, those you caught in the wild will probably never learn the new tricks you want to teach them. It's in their blood to be feral, and you must respect that. For a corporation, or

those other parties who have the resources, personnel, and facilities, it's better to breed up a new generation you can train from their earliest days.

- Signature breeds can reach mascot status among troop formations. In cases such as Amazonia, I've seen them attain totemic importance, even among un-Awakened forces.
- Picador

- They also make for great sales. Most of the megacorps have at least one private security provider under their umbrella, and their success can make the toys they use look that much sexier to prospective clients, either contracts or gear. Knight Errant was making a fortune for Ares back when they were overtaking Lone Star in Seattle. Sales for Predators alone went up five hundred percent.
- Mr. Bonds

- That applies to animals, too?
- Lei Kung

- Absolutely. Services for the breeding and training of guard animals are usually handled by one or even several different subsidiaries. There's a fair degree of consistency in what they offer. You know how corporations love their standards and catalogues.
- Lacey

- It sounds like you resent the uniformity of their stock.
- Red

- I do. Maybe corps like perfectly measurable quantities, but real life doesn't work that way. When you train the personality out of them, you lose all those little quirks that can turn into real strengths. That's one more thing the corps just can't seem to figure out, so they keep acquiring more breeding stock trying to put some fire back in bloodlines. Damn foolish.
- Lacey

- Makes it harder to form bonds between handler and beastie, too. Corp animals often end up handling like drones. Pound for pound, bet on the one from the wild or raised in the shadows, every time.
- DangerSensei

- It hardly bears mention that animals put on sale are sterile and often have genetic instabilities that don't affect the animal's performance but make cloning extremely difficult.
- The Smiling Bandit

Believe it or not, most breeders keep doing it the old-fashioned way instead of cloning. Sure, cloning animals is much cheaper than cloning metahumans, but letting the hounds rut is even less expensive. Usually the best specimens have samples taken for cloning, just in case, and then they're put to rut. Generation by generation, a new breed emerges, customized for a specific task, just like we've been doing forever. Foxhounds and lapdogs, race horses and Kobe beef, fat chickens and lean protein. It's the slow path to genetic engineering.

- Darwin has nothing on megacorps. And vice versa.
- The Smiling Bandit

THE KENNEL

The housing of the beasties is about as complex as the creature itself. As a rule, supernatural animals cost about ten times as much to maintain as mundane ones. That includes safety precautions in their housing and handling, dietary and veterinary needs, and the specialists who know how to handle them.

But I know what you're really curious about: Is it on site? Can it help me on a run? Is it worth anything?

First, the kennel. Is it on-site? Probably. If it's a big, isolated facility, absolutely. It's cheaper to just keep them there and out of the way than to ship them back and forth every day. If there's a barracks for security, then animals won't be shipped in, either. You can probably find them pretty close together, in fact.

- In other words, blow one with explosives, and you can probably take the other out, too.
- Kane

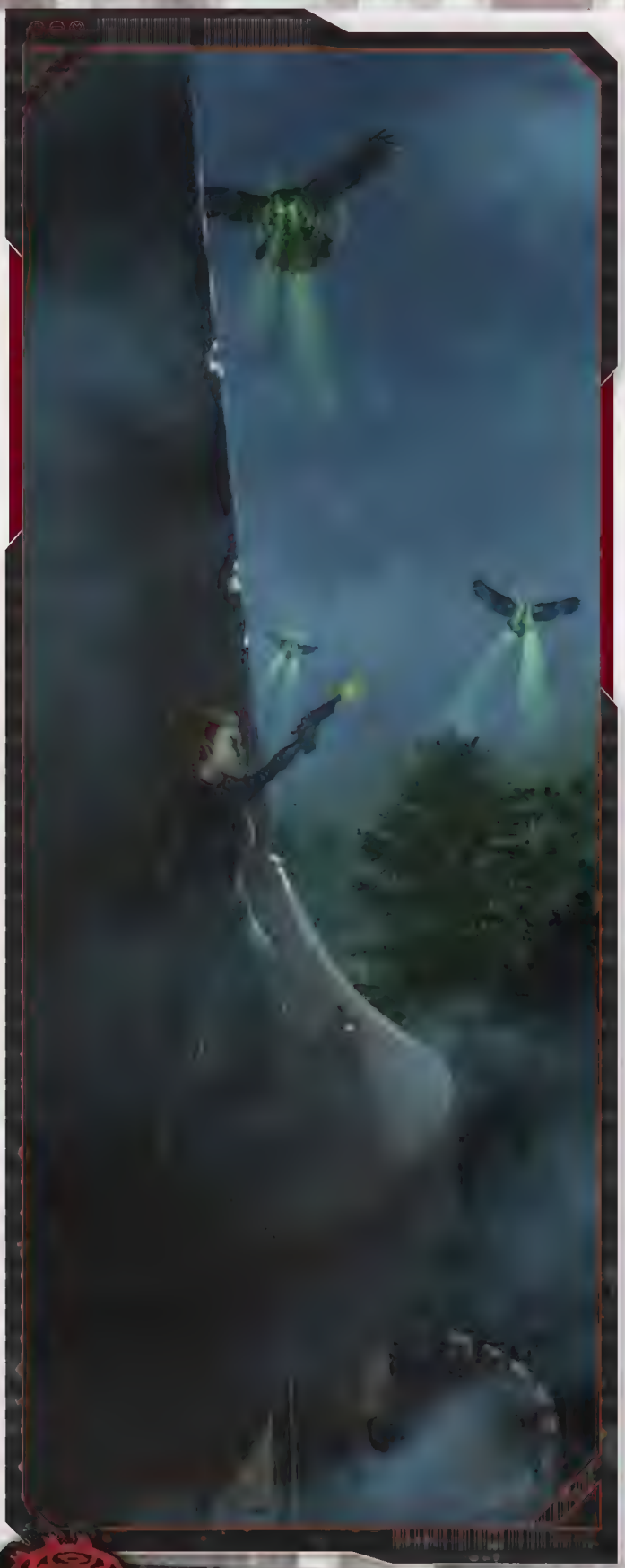
- The way security cycles work, you won't get that many of them. And it would have to be the opening move. Once you pull that, the alarms are off and blaring.
- Fianchetto

- How is that different from normal?
- Kane

- Of course. I forgot who I was talking to.
- Fianchetto

On-site kennels have the same problems for you as on-site barracks. It may take time for them to muster up, but there are reinforcements close at hand. In the case of critters, they likely wake up faster, ready to fight, with no equipment to toss on. Security can just unleash them.

For most installations, though, like ones you'd find in office complexes, factories, or other industrial sites, the beasts are usually kept in the same facilities that house the standard security officers' gear. You get up in the morning, go to the office, get your gun and vest, grab the leash, and head to the facility you are watching. When the shift is up, you do the same in reverse. This is far



more likely for hounds of various types, both mundane and Awakened, since they are exceptionally mobile and quite standard for security. More exotic types like aerials, aquatics, and really tricky ground-based beasties require much more in the way of transport and get a dedicated unit for their deployment. They are usually integral to the facility, so their kennels are often on-site. You see this more with isolated or enormous places, where they have room to roam.

Hounds get a special caveat, though. More often than not, canine units (and that refers to both the fuzzy beastie and its handler) are 24/7 partners. The dog lives with the metahuman, eats with them, sleeps in the same home, and goes to work with them. Officers like that usually don't have a family, since there's a dog that's trained to kill on premises, but it happens with smarter breeds on occasion. These are lifelong partnerships, and you're more likely to see a canine cop without their gun than without their dog.

- It's worth noting that these security officers aren't going to treat their partner like a piece of equipment. That dog is family to them, and either will risk their life to save the other. They'll play it cautious, play it safe, and have the tightest tactical coordination you can get short of a mindlink spell.
- Lacey

- A few units have adapted BattleTac software to link and coordinate handlers and their canine units.
- Pistons

- How do the dogs even understand the data?
- Baka Dabora

- Training. Pattern recognition, sound cues, even scents. You'd be amazed how much a smart dog can learn and remember.
- The Smiling Bandit

Can a kennel help you on a run? Maybe. Knowing where to avoid is always good, but if the beasties are kept in their holding pens until they need to be unleashed, a decker can lock down their cells to prevent them from entering the fray, or you might seal the door yourself with a torch or freeze foam. You could gas the area to knock them out, too.

Is it worth money? It actually can be! If the corp is keeping especially exotic specimens, you might be able to fence some of the vet gear or their equipment if you know the right people. Some of the pharmaceuticals exotics require are quite pricey.

- Just don't make the mistake of thinking any old street doc will buy them off you. Sure, Doxycycline-Delta is the same whether you give it to a metahuman or an animal,

but some creatures will have specialized medications. You certainly don't want the mercury content of a Hemapren dose designed for mermaids.

- Lacey

- When in doubt, remember that drugs for Awakened creatures are less compatible with humans and more expensive for specialists. If you are gonna use them yourself, use the ones for dogs and other mammals. You probably won't be surprised how many street docs use antibiotics lifted from vets, with dosages adjusted properly.
- Butch

- What, you use fish meds to patch up runners?
- Whippet

- Whatever works. Considering my prices, I doubt you should complain.
- Butch

- On the hardware side, a mounted camera or even weapon on the back of a guard animal can easily be repurposed. Armor can be recycled into patchwork or piecemeal protective gear, as well.
- Red Anya

HOW TO TRAIN YOUR HELLHOUND

I happen to have a hellhound puppy of my own named Woofles. He's the most snug13r2g867e6gry13

- Sorry, but that's a lot of time I just saved you.
- Slamm-0

- tl;dr Woofles is cute.
- Red

$(&GRFEU9qery time his wee tail wags.

You might wonder why I would use a hellhound as an example, aside from my personal experience. Well, the hellhound is the perfect midway between the familiar and the new. At their core, a hellhound is the same as a dog, psychologically. They have the same degree of loyalty, territoriality, and instinct, just with a few modifications (which I will get to shortly).

The hellhound also covers the new factors of the Awakening. Sure it's a big dog, but it can breathe fire. It's dual natured. If you're not a mage and it isn't disciplined, it might go chasing something in the astral that you can't see as soon as it might chase the paperboy. And Ghost help that paperboy.

- What's a paperboy?
- Whippet

So let's say you acquire a hellhound of your own. You fireproof your home and stock up on burn cream and kibble. What's next?

THE NEEDS

First, you've got to figure out the details of your chosen beastie. Food and shelter, we figured that out already, so what about its environment? Its psychology?

Environment should be pretty obvious. Birds gotta fly, fish gotta swim, dogs gotta run. Don't buy a horse if you can't afford a pasture. An animal out of its element can't be anything more than a pet, and it'll be an unhappy one at that. Figure if the beastie is right for the place you're going to call its home, or you'll be wasting a lot of time and money, and making the poor thing miserable. With the wrong animal, that can be a lethal mistake.

Psychology is trickier, but you've got to do it or you'll never pull this off. Understand the natural habits of the animal. Those habits are informed by countless generations of instinct. There's a reason animals generally considered to be wild breeds make poor pets: they've got fewer generations between them and the feral. Doesn't matter if you raise them from young, it's in the blood. Even dogs still have instincts from before we started training them, and that was, what, five thousand years ago? Believe me, they're bigger than you and bigger than the beastie. Respect them, and the beastie will respect you.

So consider the hellhound, whose psychology is a lot like that of a dog. They are pack animals, so they respect a hierarchy, specifically an alpha. That's what you need to be. They have adapted to live wherever metahumans can. They like walks, they like meat, they like pets. They like running and wrestling and playing tug of war, and they like claiming territory. Remember to take their awakened nature into account, though: hellhounds don't like baths. It's not like it'll kill them, and I've heard of the odd one who loves a swim, but nine times out of ten you'll get a hellhound that just cooks itself clean. Better hope the neighbors don't mind the scent of barbecued dog hair.

- Considering some odors in the Barrens, that's not the worst thing.
- Turbo Bunny

If we were talking about another kind of animal, you'd have to take its needs into consideration just as well. Dogs really are easiest, but I suppose you could adapt most beasties the same way. Still, birds, fish, they don't learn like we do, or think like we do. Their needs are different, their thoughts a bit alien. And never mind insects, even big ones. If they *do* have thoughts, they are just instinct. No one is gonna train a bug to do anything.

- Never been to Chicago, huh?
- Sticks

Now you've got a blueprint of how to work and live with your hellhound. Exercise (and the right kind of environment to do it in), respect their territorial needs (few visitors, and a space just for him), and always maintain your authority as the alpha in his mind.

THE CARROT

Dogs are easy. Dogs like to be loved. They return it in spades. So you earn their love through bribery. Create happy associations through positive reinforcement. A leads to B leads to C. Even cats will learn that the metahuman of the house means food. Dogs are smarter, stronger, and nicer, so they'll respond even better. A metahuman will take them on walks and feed them tasty treats when they do the right stuff, play games and snuggle them. On a survival instinct level, they'll respond to the source of what brings them happiness and fulfills their needs with protection and proximity. On a sentimental level, they'll love you, and they'll fight to protect the ones they love.

- Who in the hell cuddles a hellhound?
- Glitch

- That's how I know you've never done it. They are surprisingly soft.
- Red

- Not all of us regenerate, you know.
- Bull

- Hellhound fire is magical. I don't regenerate it any more than you do.
- Red

THE STICK

Of course, there's a need for discipline, too. Even the sweetest puppy gets out of line, and with a hellhound, a lot more restraint is needed for all parties. See, the dog reckons you as part of a pack. Its pack. And it's still the bred-in instincts of a beastie built for battle. The strongest dog is at the top. So you've got to be ready for when they start a tussle with you and it gets serious. Lots of fighting is play, but when they get to about doggy teenager years, they'll test you, just like how they are testing their new strength. Just like a metahuman teenager, really. Doesn't matter how sweet and cuddly they've been up until then, they're gonna start something. And when that happens, you've got to shut it down fast. Doesn't matter how sweet you've been to them before, if you let them walk all over you now, it's your ass. With a normal dog, you're going to see its attitude change if it somehow bests you. It gets pushy, gets nippy, starts treating you like it's the boss. Like a cat. You shouldn't take it personally, it's just their instincts. Getting that respect back means reasserting your alpha status, and that's a lot more work, because they'll fight to stay on top. They fight as hard as you should have fought, but with teeth and claws. Now imagine that with a big ol' hellhound, breathing fire on you.

When the time comes, it's about making an efficient, decisive show of force. You've got a psychological advantage if you raised them from a pup, because they've thought of you as being in charge for their whole lives and they know they are comfortable and happy even if they lose. Plus, even if they've grown a whole lot, they still think of you as being larger-than-life. It'll take less work, and the need to go through it all won't come up as much. Knock 'em down and hold them down, usually around the neck. Doesn't mean you need to be cruel or actually hurt them, but they have to feel that you are in charge. I suggest using your weight, and remember that neck trick.

- How does a little elf like you manage to keep a hellhound in line?
- 2XL

- I'm a changeling. Got a weird trick out of it, mages tell me. They say I change the astral around me gradually, and spells never seem to work on me.
- Rainbow

- Astral hazing? How do you avoid doing damage to dual-natured creatures during their developmental phases?
- Elijah

- I'll take this one. The hazing isn't like in hostile entities. Since Rainbow isn't a mage, the hazing just reflects her overall mood the longer she stays in one place. She's usually very sunny and very into animals, so you get a vaguely Disney feeling in her vet lab. That being said, I get a headache whenever I'm around her in person for more than an hour, and it gets worse as time goes on. Woofles seems to have developed a tolerance for it.
- Red

- I get the same complaint from other mages, too. But the animals never seem bothered.
- Rainbow

- So you're immune to Awakened animal effects, and you have an aura of goodwill to all animals? Man, some people really do find their niche in life.
- 2XL

You never really stop the cycle of teaching a dog, but it's not quite the way you think. You keep a pet, and the pet keeps you. You get used to one another, learn

together, and love each other. We don't think about it, but the beasties become family, and it gets hard to imagine your life without 'em. So treat them right. You'll save each other's lives, even if you never go on another run again.

- I think I'm going to be sick. When did JackPoint become an after-school special? I'll stick with drones, thanks. Less shit, no kibble, and none of this touchy-feely crap.
- Clockwork

PUTTING THEM TO SLEEP

POSTED BY: LACEY

- I managed to find an expert in security animals, a nice gentleman who does freelance work training security paracritters when he's not tending kennel for Eagle Security. Pay attention, because this actually cost me money. Supposedly he's one of the best, though, so let's hope he's worth it.
- Slamm-0!

- Slamm-0! considers season passes to the Red Wings to be money.
- Lacey

- THEY ARE WORTH MORE THAN MONEY.
- Slamm-0!

- Honey, we all know you hacked them and didn't put out any cash.
- Netcat

- Labor isn't free!
- Slamm-0!

Slamm-0! asked me (rather nicely) if I would compile a little precis on the various corps, how they deploy animal units, and a few basic tips on how to counter them. Consider us even, old buddy.

BEAST SLAYING

Fighting paranatural critters is part and parcel of living in the world we do. No matter where you go in the Sixth World, you're never more than three feet from an insect, a rat, or something bigger and meaner. If you know what to look for, you'll spot it sooner. If you know how to handle it, you'll survive the encounter, maybe even make some money out of it.

First, understand that groups that use critters don't consider them tacked onto the security profile of their zone. Animals are treated like integral security features, which means their tactics are more dependent on the critters than you might realize. If you see ghost dogs, knocking them out of the equation gives you a good chance of taking out a significant portion of their astral security. Critter security is often a cost-efficient way to cover your weak points when the budget won't allow for necessary coverage.

- Mostly true. The importance of animal security to a facility can be gauged by the relative value of the assets on site. If the location is a low priority, animals might be covering blind spots, while a high-priority location is probably using animals as a redundant system.
- DangerSensei

Second, be aware of the limitations of your foes. Most security animals have limited natural armor because they go for mobile creatures over slow ones, and speed drops the more armor you pile on. Hence, if the animal has any armor at all (such as barding on a dog), it'll be light, sparse, and thin. That means your armor-piercing rounds will punch right through it, though I think that's a bit cold for any animal. The lack of coverage and reinforcement means that most tranq darts will pierce through, and the exposed legs can prove just as vulnerable to a SuperSquirt loaded up with narcoject and DMSO.

- Again, I ask, who gives a shit?
- Clockwork

- Remember earlier when we read that most animal security units live together 24/7? You stun them for the same reason you don't gun down every guard you come across: because it's the moral thing to do.
- Sunshine

- Or, if you're a cold-hearted bastard, it means you're less likely to get some rogue guard on your ass for revenge, and you're less likely to get a corp strike team after you for causing so much damage. Remember, as far as the corps are concerned, personnel are the same as corp property, and causing a lot of collateral damage is a great way to get a mark just to send a message.
- Thorn

- That makes more sense.
- Clockwork

The next limitation: narrow focus. Animals can be trained to have degrees of perception and focus the likes of which no metahuman could reach. Drawback? Animals don't have our capacity for judgment. They can't recognize a trap or a false lead nearly as well as we can. Their limited understanding means you can misdirect them much easier than a metahuman. Fake scent trails and sound emitters can draw them off patrol

routes. Similarly, you can fool those extra senses they depend on with scent blockers, magical or counter-sonic sound nullification, and much more. Know the precise capabilities of your foe, and you'll be amazed how much trust guards put in the senses of their animals. You fool the animals, and the guard takes for granted things are all right, because the animals aren't reacting.

- Don't forget that a lot of dual-natured critters aren't going to be depending on physical senses alone. Sometimes they can even be trained to sniff out specific emotional states. The only way to disguise that is to change your emotional outlook.
- Red

- What, think happy thoughts?
- Bull

- Or drop an emotion chip.
- Turbo Bunny

WHO IS USING WHAT?

A megacorporation is bigger than any government, and covers far more territory, so no list of megacorporate security animals could possibly be comprehensive, let alone complete. Still, the corps have their own specializations, trademarks, and trends.

ARES MACROTECHNOLOGY

Ares likes its dogs, definitely. They cultivate the classic Doberman security dog as a counterpoint to their sleek, black Knight Errant look. Rumor has it they like to use hellhounds for high security and containment facilities, particularly their magical R&D. Ares maintains the dual edges of appearances and application. Their animals are well-trained, well-equipped, ready for public appraisal and opinion, but ready to fly and fight at a moment's notice. You shouldn't expect much in the way of exotics. They have refined old practices, stuck with what works and added to it. Animals will likely continue to attack enemies even if their handler has been taken down, and they will have excellent armor when they can wear it. This is the gold standard for 2070s animal security.

- The odds of you actually running across flesh-form guard animals are insanely low. Still, this is the time to carry an insecticide grenade. Just in case.
- Red

AZTECHNOLOGY

Give the Azzies points for maintaining a theme, I have seen them use actual domesticated jungle cats the way other corps use dogs. Pumas on a leash, no drek. They like their animals flashy, fast, and sharp, and they'll happily slip the leash and watch the blood fly. Big, mean, and wild animals suit their style perfectly. That means less training, since they tend to think their inherent instincts are dulled by training. Unless there is magic at work keeping the animal in check, it might just lash out at its handler or others in a stress situation, and you can probably expect people in the base to have some fresh bites and slashes. That can work in your favor.

- The master becomes the prey with only a hint of weakness.
- Man-of-Many-Names

NEONET

NeoNET enjoys cybernetically augmented animals, especially biodrones. They make heavy use of superior network channels and electronic warfare to use them just like drones, tapping into their instincts the way a rigger might with a drone's skillsofts. They especially like experimenting with biodrones in aerial patterns, sometimes using one animal as a signal booster for the rest. Take that one out, and you may scramble signals enough to send their biodrones into disarray. This control-freak attitude makes their use of paracritters infrequent by comparison, maybe assigned to specific projects and people for limited durations. NeoNET gets by far more often on its mages than its paranatural security.

- Before anyone asks, Celedyr is so busy experimenting on technocritters that they can't spare them for security, though you can be sure once he can recreate them, NeoNET facilities will use them in droves.
- Frosty

SAEDER-KRUPP

The big dragon corporation is too huge to follow any real pattern. They tend to use big, mean creatures, dual-natured when possible, almost always long in the tooth and ferocious. S-K is also likely to go for flashy augmentations like hydraulic jaws and dermal plating, turning big creatures into industrial nightmare fuel. What's more, they aren't kept in the wings. S-K critter security is paraded right out front where people can see them, probably as a deterrent and for psychological effect. When they favor a particular paracritter, the barghest makes an excellent showpiece.

RENRAKU COMPUTER SYSTEMS

Maybe not much of a surprise, but Renraku isn't big on animal security. Their focus on control over their own people means that they don't like variables, and from Renraku's perspective, a mere animal lacks discipline and discernment. You'd think they might place more value on loyalty, considering their continual problems

in that regard, but they maintain the line. When animals play a part, it's usually something very simple and traditional, like guard dogs (usually for low-level security and sniffing for explosives or narcotics), though it has become a small fashion among management-level corporate culture to sport with hunting hawks, so they are starting to catch on for anti-drone maneuvers as a kind of aesthetic security measure.

- So much effort to maintain control and never any room for trust. They have learned nothing from Aneki's sacrifice.
- Icarus

EVO

Security animals are produced by Evo, rather than bred. The animals are often the product of genetic experimentations, and their performance is as much a function of security as an observational exercise. More than anything, you can expect the unexpected, though more often than not they are trying new genetic adaptations. I've heard of animals that had immediate responses to stabilize bullet wounds, resist flames or magic, and other effects. If they want a metahuman to be able to do it someday, they're going to try it on an animal, first. And field tests are always the best.

- This is a great way to make some extra cash after the run, if you have the opportunity and means to capture one. Evo critters that show novel abilities can fetch a great price to the right buyer.
- Red

SHIAWASE

Shiawase is a big, clever mess of a corp right now. If you are striking one of their public façades, you'll see a cross between the polish of Ares and the casual disdain of Renraku, with entirely presentable but not very important dogs and the like, maybe with some augmentations but nothing very extreme or expensive. What's interesting is when you visit their toxic sites. They've made lemons into lemonade by trying to tame mutant critters. Most of the time this doesn't go well for anyone, but when it works, they have terrifying specimens, and they are rarely the same twice. That means they are usually added to a balanced security scheme, like frosting on a cake. They are wildcards, deployed where needed, and purely for combat effectiveness, since something as ugly as a mutant isn't for show.

MITSUHAMA COMPUTER TECHNOLOGIES

MCT Zero Zones are the stuff of runner legend, and critters often play a part in them. MCT is most likely to use paracritters that are too hazardous to work alongside metahuman personnel, such as cockatrices. They might also use exotic gasses, chemicals, fungi, and other meaner things in combination. Of all the corporations, MCT is the only one I might suspect of sealing a room and releasing wasps genetically altered to sting with nerve agents. And internally circulating the video of the results.

HORIZON

On the surface, Horizon doesn't use security animals. Most of their security is as photogenic as the rest of their corporation, but anyone who has ever tried to breach it knows that its soft, light appearance hides vicious, brutal tactics. Here, you can expect what appear to be designer pets or exotic plants. You try to extract some notional lab sweatervest geek, and the long neck shih tzu with velvety glow fur he's been carrying around hisses and spits something in your eye that knocks you out. Or it grows fangs and bites you. Or it just plain explodes, if you managed to get the guy out. Horizon's best moves are the ones you never see, so it's important to make sure you are always, always paranoid around anything in their territory.

- Some of their little monstrosities can be worth a pretty penny, like those Evo creatures above. Not as much in research value, but just for their design. They are artistically amazing, usually a delight to hold, the kind of thing any celebrity would demand once they saw it. Of course, as mentioned above, it could be poisonous, explosive, or many other terrible things. I have it on good authority that Wynona Flying-Horse's little tabloid comeback last year was on account of a hot Horizon designer pet spitting hallucinogens in her eyes.
- Beaker

WUXING

Of all the megacorps, Wuxing is most likely to have paracritters in spades. Their links to international shipping and talismongering means they have the easiest access, and they have the employee expertise to best take advantage of it. While they have access all over the world, they get the most from their Pacific trade routes, so you can expect more paracritters from those regions. Wuxing is most likely to deploy the critters with mage support, allowing their handler to use spells for greater control over packs and flocks.

- It's worse than that: Wuxing mages tend to learn spells that let them see through the eyes of their animals or control their tactics, like magical bio drone riggers. I've never seen paracritter security utilized so effectively.
- Red

- They also use aquatic creatures to help defend their shipments. Taking a Wuxing freighter means mages and ordnance, and plenty of both. The upside? Surf and turf for all survivors!
- Kane

MUNDANE CRITTERS

"So what should we do next? Pour honey on her feet and let the rats nibble on her toes?" says a redheaded female, whose curly hair drapes along the back of a faux leather chair. She slowly rotates the chair, half paying attention to either the real world or augmented screens.

"Good idea dear." responds from a voice from the shadows of another chair.

"Or how about walking the plank into chummed water with sharks? She doesn't need all her limbs."

"Sharks, dear? That's a bit drastic, don't you think?"

The redhead stops her rotation to look toward the other chair. Some of her freckles merge as she squints her eyes in irritation, "Mother, you brought her to me. Now I want Kane to go through Hell!"

The other chair turns. In it sits a beautiful, dark skinned woman, slightly older than the redhead. She lifts her head up from her commlink. Her orange eyes stare back intensely, causing the redhead's irritated gaze to falter, "Ginger, my dear, Kane must be handled carefully. While he wouldn't care if he loses any crew to his own action, that girl is something different. I wouldn't be surprised if he called in his favors and blackmail to bring in most military forces to chase you to the ends of the earth if she is accidently killed in your extreme method of torture. So stick to the plan. He should receive the present soon, along with the wetwork list he has to complete."

"And if he doesn't?"

"I have a plan B."

"Typical, mother, that you don't share your thoughts."

Before Gingersnap had a chance to rev up into a full litany of complaints, a man ran into the room and interrupted the conversation with a gravelly throat-clearing.

Gingersnap turned quickly on him. "Yes, Jacques? Speak before I slit your throat to clear it for you."

"Captain, the prisoner escaped!"

"Damn you Jacques! Mother! I thought she was still under the influence?"

"She has to be! Someone must have helped her. Jacques, check the tunnels. Ginger, continue with the plan. She will not leave the island."

Has it been hours? Days? Hopefully not weeks. /dev/grrl's mind fought against the fog, trying to keep hold of one train of thought as her body moved with difficulty, like wading through water.

Even while awake, she felt like she was still dreaming. Visions of skeletons dancing to Caribbean music while cutting sugar cane in the hot sun moved through her vision. Visions she knew she could not trust. A dull pain lurked in her hands and face, and she couldn't remember how long they had been there. There had been one moment, once, when she felt a sharp pain in her eye, and she briefly focused on a red-tinged room and someone with curly hair before her vision turned to shuffling zombies reaching for her to pull her down and consume every last bit of her.

Focus! They will find you if you don't keep moving. The thought pulsed stronger than the pain, making her legs shuffle forward again. It sounded like her voice in her head, but still didn't feel like her thought. /dev/grrl tried to adjust her eyes to where she was going, but everything looked like varying shades of darkness.

A small prick of light appeared and swayed in front of her. *Follow it, Chérie,* a new thought said to her, and she could think of nothing to do but listen. She moved forward, hoping the hint of light she thought she saw ahead was not another hallucination.

WILD LANDS

Outside the civilized lands are many mundane beasts with claws, wings, or hooves. They pose their own risks and offer their own possible assistance to a shadowrunner in need, so a wise runner knows what might be out there waiting for them—and how to deal with it.

ALLIGATOR

Alligator covers both alligators and crocodiles These creatures can grow up to four hundred kilos and around four meters of reptilian power. There are always rumors of them living in the sewers of big cities. Or vacationing there when visiting relatives. Whatever might bring them there, it's best not to be near them and their massively powerful jaws. How powerful? While you can bite at maybe two hundred newtons, a crocodile's bite is a tremendously scary 16,460 newtons.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
6	5	4	6	1	1	2	2	3	6

Initiative	6 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x6/+4
Condition Monitor	14/9
Limits	Physical 10, Mental 2, Social 4
Armor	6
Skills	Perception 4, Sneaking 4, Tracking 4, Unarmed Combat 4
Powers	Armor (6), Enhanced Senses (Smell), Natural Weapon (Bite, DV (STR+2)P, AP –2), Toughness (2)

BEAR

From grizzly to black, these omnivores continue to roam the wilds. The bigger ones can be over three hundred kilos and over two meters tall. The polar bear was the first of the family to go extinct. It was also the first to be recovered from extinction thanks to the Doomsday Ark project in 2062, beating the independent Russian project by two years. With the Doomsday Ark, the polar bear was also the first de-extinct species to be reintroduced into the wild by 2065.

ALLIGATOR MENTOR SPIRIT

A follower of the Gator mentor spirit feels at home in cities as well as swamps and rivers. Gator shamans are ill-tempered and lazy, expecting a larger share for the work he does—assuming you can get him to agree to do it. He is also a miser when it comes to having to pay for anything including meals and he's a real big eater. The virtuous aspects of the gator magician is that he's a strong fighter and will finish what he agrees to do. They may seem to be motionless, but once roused to action they are ferocious and nearly unstoppable.

ADVANTAGES

All: +2 to Intimidation skill tests

Magician: +2 to Conjuring skill tests for spirits of water or man (choose one)

Adept: Receives Inertia Strike power for free

Disadvantages: A follower of the alligator is stubborn in changing plan or action after he has committed to it. When the rest of the team goes to plan B, the magician must succeed in a Charisma + Willpower (3) Test to make the mental adjustment. Otherwise, they continue trying to execute plan A.

Similar Archetypes: Crocodile, Sloth, Greed

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
6	4	5	6	4	1	2	3	3	6

Initiative	7 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x8/+2
Condition Monitor	13/10
Limits	Physical 10, Mental 3, Social 6
Armor	3
Skills	Gymnastics 3, Intimidation 3, Perception 4, Running 3, Tracking 4, Unarmed Combat 4
Powers	Armor (3), Enhanced Senses (Smell), Natural Weapon (Claws/Bite: DV (STR+3)P, AP -1)

BOAR

Wild boars are massively built in a stocky frame. They can reach up to bear size weight at 270 kilos. They have an angular head and tusks so that they can plow even in

frozen soil and overturn rocks around a quarter of their weight. They can be found in many places around the world, mainly in forests though they can adapt to grasslands and other areas. They are most common in the CAS and Central Europe, making themselves pests by digging up ground cables or breaking through fences.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
5	2	4	5	2	1	2	2	2	6

Initiative	6 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x8/+2
Condition Monitor	11/9
Limits	Physical 7, Mental 2, Social 4
Armor	4
Skills	Perception 3, Running 2, Tracking 4, Unarmed Combat 4
Powers	Armor (4), Enhanced Senses (Smell), Natural Weapon (Bite/Tusk: DV (STR+2)P, AP –1)

CHIMPANZEE

Chimpanzees are one of the last species of great apes that still exist in the wild, and the only remaining African species. Chimpanzees can make tools, interact in sophisticated social groups, understand sign language, display altruistic behavior, and even laugh. Chimpanzees are often at the center of controversy as organizations try to bring them the same sapient rights as nagas and centaurs. This inevitably results in the flinging of poo.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
4	4	4	4	3	2	4	3	3	6

Initiative	8 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Condition Monitor	10/10
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 4, Social 5
Armor	0
Skills	Athletics skill group 4, Clubs 3, Perception 4, Thrown Weapons 2, Unarmed Combat 6
Powers	Brachiation, Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+2)P, AP —)

EAGLE

Eagles are majestic birds of prey. From bald and golden to Steller's sea eagles, there are more than fifty kinds of eagles in the world. These birds can have a wingspan of 2.5 meters and weigh around six to nine kilos. Of all the raptors, eagles have the most protection as various nations and corporations have used their image in flags and logos. Woe to those who mess with a golden eagle in Aztlan or a black eagle in AGS.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
2	5	4	2	3	1	4	3	4	6

Initiative	8 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x4/+4 (x3/x7/+6 flight)
Condition Monitor	10/10
Limits	Physical 4, Mental 3, Social 5
Armor	0
Skills	Flight 3, Perception 5, Tracking 2, Unarmed Combat 3
Powers	Natural Weapon (Bite/Claw: DV (STR+2)P, AP —), Enhanced Senses (Magnification)

ELEPHANT

This rare, majestic animal is all but extinct in the wild. Corporations and wealthy individuals have maintained personal herds around the globe, often trading genetic material like currency to sustain the species. They can weigh four to six tons and grow six to eight meters in length. While the African elephant has a higher population, the Asian elephant has more territory globally dedicated to them, as it continues to be used as cheap labor.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
12	4	4	16	2	2	3	3	2	6

Initiative	7 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x18/+2
Condition Monitor	14/9
Limits	Physical 16, Mental 3, Social 5
Armor	6
Skills	Clubs 5, Perception 4, Running 4, Unarmed Combat 2
Powers	Armor (6), Enhanced Senses (Low Frequency), Natural Weapon (Tusk: DV (STR+2)P, AP –2),
Note	+2 Reach

GIRAFFE

A giraffe's legs are almost two meters tall on their own, combined with a long neck, they can easily reach a height of 5.5 meters. Without the other larger fauna, giraffes have become the primary target of poachers. Never fear, though—thanks to projects like the Kilimanjaro Mass Driver, corporations like NeoNET, Saeder-Krupp, and Evo have a vested interest in building wildlife preserves to add a positive spin on their work.

BOAR MENTOR SPIRIT

Followers of the Boar are static in their ways. They keep to a daily routine and hold on to their stuff till it wears away. Some people would call them boring or unspontaneous, others would call them hoarders. Followers believe themselves to be loyal to the places that are part of their routine, and they are very protective of their territory.

ADVANTAGES

All: Home Ground Quality is gained for free.

Magician: +1 to the number of services gained when successfully summoning a spirit

Adept: Gains Rooting (2) (p. 24, Shadow Spells) power for free.

Disadvantages: A follower of Boar does not like it if there are others intruding in his space or disrupting his routine. At best, the follower protects the bar and employees of the bar he always goes to. At worst, he will start a fight for a specific table or stool that he thinks is his. A warning is optional and usually proffered by the follower's friends. It takes a Charisma + Willpower (3) Test for a follower of Boar to leave his home, safehouse, or routine permanently, otherwise he will keep coming back, even at the risk of his own safety. If the Boar does leave, he receives a –1 penalty to all active skill tests for three weeks until he finally settles into a new place and routine.

TRIVIA-VERSE

Lone Star has a division of trained hawks and eagles for use in parks and rural areas for security checks. These birds are trained to spot and retrieve small drones in the area. Lone Star equips these birds with lightweight protection in case the drone is uncooperative.

Even Armanté has funded fashions based on the African safari-wear, so that tourists can come all dressed up like Dr. Livingstone and see real-life giraffes.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
10	3	3	8	2	1	2	2	2	6

Initiative	5 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x8/+4
Condition Monitor (P/S)	13/9
Limits	Physical 10, Mental 2, Social 4
Armor	2
Skills	Perception 4, Running 3, Unarmed Combat 2
Powers	Armor (2), Natural Weapon (Kick: DV (STR+1)P, AP —, Reach 2)
Note	+2 Reach

GIRAFFE MENTOR SPIRIT

A follower of the Giraffe mentor spirit sees beyond the horizon. She seeks to see/hear the truth beyond what is presented. A giraffe follower may seem a little off as she either looks off into space and appears to not pay attention or looks too intently at you as if she's judging your soul.

ADVANTAGES

All: +2 Assensing skill tests or +2 to Judge Intentions test (choose one)

Magician: +2 to Conjuring skill tests of air spirits

Adept: 2 free levels of Piercing Senses

Disadvantages: A follower of Giraffe stumbles through social etiquette, as she believes the small talk and chitchat that are the core of social chatter are fundamentally dishonest and not worthy of her efforts. She can make a wide range of situations awkward and receives –2 dice for Etiquette skill tests.

SNAKE

From cobras to boas, these legless reptiles can be found all over the world—even in the north, if you believe those snow snake stories. Snakes can come in a variety of colors and lengths. Only twenty-five percent of them are venomous, so chances are good that you will survive a bite. Unless it was part of some security setup. Then you're screwed.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
2	4	2	3	1	—	2	1	3	6

Initiative	4 + 2D6
Movement	x2/x3/+2
Condition Monitor	9/9
Limits	Physical 4, Mental 2, Social 4
Armor	0
Skills	Gymnastics 3, Perception 3, Sneaking 3, Tracking 3, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Enhanced Senses (Thermal), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+2)P, AP -)
Note	Venomous versions would also have the power Venom (Snake)

SNAKE VENOM

Vector: Injection
Speed: 1 Combat Turn
Penetration: 0
Power: 8
Effect: Nausea, Physical Damage

WILD SEAS

Many big cities reside next to some body of water, including Seattle. So chances are that you will encounter an aquatic native when you get your feet wet or have to smuggle someone or something through the water.

BARRACUDA

This species of fish can reach up to two meters in length. Its jutting, fang-like teeth make it one of the things you don't really want to meet in the water. They are found globally, mainly in warm tropical waters. The Pacific barracuda, which isn't as intimidating as its brethren, can be found as far north as the Puget Sound.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
3	3	3	2	2	—	2	1	3	6

Initiative	5 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x6/+2 swimming
Condition Monitor	9/9
Limits	Physical 3, Mental 2, Social 4
Skills	Gymnastics 3, Perception 3, Swimming 6, Unarmed Combat 4
Powers	Enhanced Senses (Smell), Gills, Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+1)P, AP —)

DOLPHIN

Dolphins have the best PR, thanks to stories of their saving sailors from savage sharks and performing cute flips and acrobatics for tourists. It's believed to be good luck if dolphins swim in your ship's wake. It should be noted that dolphins are, in fact, quite clever. There are rumors of them disturbing marker buoys or other navigation equipment to mess with ships.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
8	5	5	7	4	2	4	4	3	6

Initiative	9 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x8/+4 swimming
Condition Monitor	12/10
Limits	Physical 9, Mental 4, Social 6
Armor	2
Skills	Diving 3, Gymnastics 7, Perception 4, Swimming 5, Unarmed Combat 3
Powers	Armor (2), Enhanced Senses (Sonar)

SEA LION

Sea lions are quick and agile in the water. They are smart enough to take advantage of a wake of a ship to swim quickly, and they are able to leap up to four meters out of the water. They can be trained like aquatic security dogs. The most agile sea lions are able to grab and drag metahumans off a ship.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
7	5	4	6	3	3	4	2	3	6

Initiative	8 + 1D6
Movement	x3/x8/+4 swimming
Condition Monitor	12/10
Limits	Physical 7, Mental 3, Social 5
Armor	2
Skills	Diving 2, Gymnastics 3, Perception 2, Swimming 4, Unarmed Combat 4
Powers	Armor (2), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+2)P, AP —)

SQUID

Squid and octopi are quite smart and dexterous creatures of the sea. They can solve semi-complex puzzles and can fit through spaces as small as their bony beak. They taste kinda like rubber, if not cooked properly. Be wary of their larger brethren, as they will figure out how to eat you. And your boat.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
4	5	3	6	2	2	4	3	3	6

Initiative	7 + 1D6
Movement	x3/x8/+2 swimming
Condition Monitor	10/9
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 4, Social 5
Armor	1
Skills	Escape Artist 5, Gymnastics 6, Perception 4, Swimming 5, Unarmed Combat 4
Powers	Gills, Substance Extrusion (Ink)
Note	+3 Reach

KILLER WHALE

Killer whales are the wolves of the ocean. They can lay down bait of vomit to lure birds and they use the force of waves to knock seals back into the sea. They will even hunt in packs, pushing prey into the waiting arms of the alpha whale. If you thought Moby Dick was an ass, piss off a pod of killer whales and see what happens.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
12	6	8	13	8	2	5	2	3	6

Initiative	11 + 1D6
Movement	x3/x8/+4 swimming
Condition Monitor	14/12
Limits	Physical 15, Mental 6, Social 6
Armor	4
Skills	Diving 3, Perception 3, Swimming 4, Unarmed Combat 4
Powers	Armor 4, Enhanced Senses (Sonar), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+2)P, AP —)

DOLPHIN MENTOR SPIRIT

Followers of Dolphin are graceful, free-spirited characters who enjoy playful banter and have to move when music plays. They see things optimistically and believe there is good in the world despite current conditions of corporate politics and pollution. They are not naïve—at least, they don't believe they are. They just have faith in humanity. Somehow.

ADVANTAGES

All: +2 dice on Artisan skill tests or Pilot (Watercraft) skill tests (choose one)

Magician: +2 for health spells, preparations, and spell rituals.

Adept: Gain Flexibility (2) power for free

Disadvantages: Followers are altruistic when it comes to helping people and cannot turn a blind eye to those who they believe deserve their help. It is difficult for them not to get involved when they see someone being bullied or obviously polluting the environment. If they see such a situation, it takes a Charisma + Willpower (3) Test for a follower of Dolphin not to intervene. If the job that the follower of Dolphin is on involves polluting the environment or becoming the bully/enforcer on those less deserving, then the follower loses 2 dice after each such deed until she atones. Atonement is up to the gamemaster but can involve time and money spent with charities.

WHALE MENTOR SPIRIT

Followers of Whale appreciate beauty and the longtime traditions of working in the arts. With a long life, they also hold personal honor and loyalty in high esteem. Those Whale adopts into her personal circle receive her total loyalty, and she expects the same in return. Followers of Whale are patient in their work and will take the time to make sure all the details are complete.

ADVANTAGES

All: +2 dice to Swimming or Pilot (Watercraft) skill tests (choose one)

Magician: +2 to Conjuring skill tests for spirits of water

Adept: Receive 2 ranks in Iron Lungs (p. 23, Shadow Spells) for free.

DISADVANTAGES

Because of their personal sense of ethics, followers of the whale must honor any agreement they enter into. This can be an oath to an organization or a verbal contract with a corporation. Failing to honor the contract or oath results in a loss of a point of Magic. The Whale mentor spirit understands if circumstances to complete the contract are out of the Awakened's hands. For everything else, the follower can attempt to atone, but at the gamemaster's discretion.

TRIVIA-VERSE

WHALE RIDERS

Maori whale-riders of Aotearoa spend most of their life on the ocean with whales. Many of the followers bond to the whales and become riders above and below the waves. They have rings of rafts as their home, providing a place where they can protect young calves

URBAN

In the city there's a menagerie of pets and vermin hiding in the myriad cracks, crevices, and assorted dark places. Some people may not distinguish between pets and vermin. Some people probably don't distinguish between pets and food either.

DOMESTIC CAT

The beautiful and graceful cat has been a sacred animal, even worshiped with the ancient gods of Egypt. Their power waned and today they have to resort to me-feeds of their antics and odd jingles in competition for attention with dogs. Cats can be found in all colors and sizes, even glow in the dark thanks to the fame of the green glowing cat from the early part of the century.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
2	4	3	1	2	2	2	3	2	6

Initiative	5 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x8/+4
Condition Monitor	7/9
Limits	Physical 3, Mental 3, Social 5
Skills	Gymnastics 3, Sneaking 2, Perception 3, Tracking 3, Unarmed Combat 3
Powers	Domesticated, Enhanced Senses (Low Light)
Weaknesses	Fragile 2

COCKROACH

A pest in the modern world, cockroaches have left the tropics to the warm decay of human garbage and artificially heated homes. They are resilient to many attacks, but they mostly succeed in running away when the lights come on.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
1	2	5	0	2	—	1	—	1	6

Initiative	7 + 2D6
Movement	x2/x8/+4
Condition Monitor	1/1
Limits	Physical 2, Mental 2, Social 3
Armor	0
Skills	Gymnastics 3, Sneaking 4, Perception 2
Powers	Extra Fragile, Gestalt Consciousness, Wall Walking
Note	–1 Reach

CROW

Crows are flying thieves. They will find an opportunity to snatch your lunch from your table or grab shiny bits that were left unattended. They also can figure out puzzles, so make sure your commlink passcode isn't a simple pecking pattern.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
1	3	2	1	2	1	3	3	1	6

Initiative	7 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x4/+4 (x3/x6/+5 flight)
Condition Monitor	7/9
Limits	Physical 2, Mental 3, Social 5
Skills	Flight 6, Perception 4, Unarmed Combat 2
Powers	Gestalt Consciousness
Weaknesses	Fragile 2
Note	–1 Reach

FERRET

While being cute, smart, and good at hunting rabbits, ferrets have been banned from the CFS, DeeCee area, San Diego and a few other areas, as they can be car-

TRIVIA-VERSE

Adult cats' primary communication with each other is through body language. The verbal "meows" are actually learned behavior in trying to communicate with their metahumans.

The first bastet was identified when their odd purring sound was analyzed to be binary code.

GENETIC ENHANCEMENTS FOR PETS

Presented here are casual enhancements that are considered common or affordable. There are other genetic modifications that can cost in the millions.

Cloned: Not even death can prevent you from having the pet you want. Many of the famous animals on TV or owned by famous people have had their genetic sequence recorded. So now you too can have a trid-star's pet. Note that this would be the unmodified version. Genetic enhancements are separate and extra.

Cosmetic: Technology has reached the point of adjusting gene sequences in order to change the color or pattern of fur or feathers. Mauve ravens, stripped giraffes, and auburn cats are just a few of the possibilities.

Flore-Pet: Fluorescence allows a pet to glow when the appropriate light is shined upon it. Fluorescent pink, blue, red, and green colors are available.

Hypo-allergenic: With some enhancements, shedding and dandruff of the pet are greatly reduced. For severe allergies, the skin proteins are slightly altered to avoid the allergic reaction.

Luci-Pet: Using luciferin, pets can now generate their own soft glowing light. Yellow, blue, and green colors are available.

Munchkin: Growth is hindered, allowing for miniature or dwarf versions of a breed. This enhancement averages a thirty to fifty percent reduction in size, depending on species and breed.

Retro: How would you like a chicken with teeth? Retro engineering can activate dormant genes that were turned off during evolution. Not as popular as cosmetic enhancements. This enhancement has found enthusiasts in those wishing to turn birds back into dinosaurs.

ENHANCEMENTS

ENHANCEMENT	AVAIL	COST
Cloned	+4	x10 base cost
Cosmetic	+2	5,000¥
Flore-Pet	+2	800¥
Hypo-Allergenic	+2	1,200¥
Luci-Pet	+2	1,000¥
Munchkin	+1	500¥
Retro	+3	10,000¥

HORSE MENTOR SPIRIT

Followers of the Horse mentor spirit are the embodiment of freedom. They must be out in the open air and allowed to roam the open road. Followers are never intentionally stubborn or malicious, but they do not like to feel impeded or confined by someone else. This unfortunately also means that followers of Horse may sacrifice personal relationships for freedom.

ADVANTAGES

All: +2 dice to Running or Pilot Ground Craft) tests (choose one)

Magician: Reduce Drain Value from Reckless Summoning by 1

Adept: May learn to use the Movement critter power as a metamagic (self only, 3 times a day)

DISADVANTAGES

Followers of the Horse can't sit still for long nor be confined indoors. They must spend at least four hours a day outside and be able to run or drive around (any method of travel faster than walking). If followers are not able to meet this condition, they suffer –1 die to all action skill tests. This penalty is cumulative, meaning if the follower is stuck at a desk all day (indoors and not moving around) for two days in a a row, they suffer –2 to all actions until they get that free time in.

RACCOON MENTOR SPIRIT

Followers of Raccoon would not call themselves thieves. Maybe entrepreneurs. They are inquisitive and have an intense curiosity about things, which can lead them into danger. They are above petty thefts and don't delve into violent robberies. Followers of Raccoon are artists in the field of pilfering or trickery, and will strategize a plan that emphasizes their talent and flamboyance.

ADVANTAGES

All: +2 to Palming skill tests

Magician: +2 dice for spells, preparations, and spell rituals in the Manipulation category.

Adept: 2 Improved Sense powers

DISADVANTAGES

The Raccoon is commonly one of the Thief totems, so the followers can tend to err on the side of greed. A follower of Raccoon must make a Charisma + Willpower (3) Test to resist the urge to open that next locked door to look for something to steal, or to follow that Matrix rabbit trail in the quest for more paydata.

riers of several human respiratory diseases as well as rabies. So for their size and weight they make an excellent starting cargo for those wanting to get into smuggling.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
1	2	2	1	3	1	2	2	2	6

Initiative	4 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x6/+4
Condition Monitor	8/10
Limits	Physical 2, Mental 3, Social 5
Skills	Gymnastics 3, Perception 3, Sneaking 3, Tracking 4, Unarmed Combat 3
Powers	Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+1)P, AP —, –1 reach)
Weaknesses	Fragile 1
Note	–1 Reach

RACCOON

Raccoons are awesome. If they see what they want, they will take it. Doesn't matter if the family pet has it, or if it's in some building, they'll figure out how to distract the dog or open the lock. At least they have manners and wash their hands at every meal. With the way the Sixth World works, it wouldn't be surprising to see a brute squad of raccoons cross a street and attempt a carjacking to get a bag of soy paste in the back seat.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
1	4	2	1	3	1	3	2	2	6

Initiative	7 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x6/+4
Condition Monitor	8/10
Limits	Physical 2, Mental 3, Social 5
Skills	Gymnastics 3, Perception 4, Palming 3, Sneaking 3, Unarmed Combat 2
Powers	Enhanced Senses (Touch), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+1)P, AP —, –1 Reach)
Weaknesses	Fragile 1
Note	–1 Reach

RAT

They are only cute and cuddly when they are on the trid. When they are sitting in your cupboard eating your crackers, they are dirty vermin. Rats can be found all around the world due human migration. The bigger ones are the Norwegian wharf rats. Not even the big rats however, can take on a devil rat.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
1	3	2	—	1	1	1	1	3	6

Initiative	3 + 2D6
Movement	x2/x6/+4
Condition Monitor	6/9
Limits	Physical 1, Mental 2, Social 3
Skills	Gymnastics 3, Perception 3, Sneaking 3, Unarmed Combat 2
Powers	Enhanced Senses (Smell), Gestalt Consciousness, Natural Weapon (Bite: DV 1P, AP —, –1 Reach)
Weaknesses	Fragile 3
Note	–1 Reach

SPIDER

They are scary, eight-legged things, which are banned from the bedrooms and bathrooms of reasonable people everywhere. While they are beneficial thanks to their insect-catching and -eating efforts, they can do that outside. If a spider violates the accords, they will be met with extreme force, not excluding napalm.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
1	2	3	—	1	—	1	1	3	6

Initiative	3 + 2D6
Movement	x2/x6/+4
Condition Monitor	8/9
Limits	Physical 1, Mental 1, Social 3
Skills	Gymnastics 4, Perception 3, Sneaking 4
Powers	Fragile 1, Gestalt Consciousness, Wall Walking
Note	–1 Reach

- Where did this post come from?
- Slamm-0!

- Well, you said I should start writing children books. I'm just putting together my musings on a few animals. What do you think?
- Kane

- Perfect.
- Slamm-0!

UPDATES FOR CRITTERS IN SR5 CORE RULEBOOK

Here are some quick changes to make to mundane critters in the *SR5* core book to bring them up to date with this book!

Dog: Add Domesticated
Great Cat: Add Improved Sense (Low Light)
Horse: Add Domesticated
Shark: Add Gills

TRIVIA-VERSE

Bottleneck genetics have been a growing concern for many species since the twentieth century. As an example, all golden hamsters are descended from the same mother in Syria in the 1930s. Even the wild golden hamsters have a genetic connection from that same litter. Science has progressed enough to reduce the bottlenecks with modified gene therapy, artificially expanding genetic diversity.

Chihuahuas were the first breed of native domestic dog in North America. They are believed to be the descendants of the Techichi, a dog that was favored by the Toltecs and considered a symbol of the upper class by the Aztecs. Because of this, Aztechnology has re-engineered the Techichi breed. Techichi are available only in Aztlan, and exports are strictly controlled.

SPIDER MENTOR SPIRIT

Spider likes to feel a connection to everything. To be at the center of a web connecting all sorts of news and able to feel the pulse of the world. Followers of Spider like to be in the know, establishing connections, be it directly with people or through surveillance. Some may feel that followers of Spider are nothing more than Awakened bloggers who scan the Matrix for tidbits of the truth.

ADVANTAGES

All: +2 dice to Computer skill tests
Magician: +2 dice for Illusion spells
Adept: Hang time (2)

DISADVANTAGES

Followers of Spider are already paranoid about people having any misconceptions about them being insect shamans. They will keep such details from casual conversation. Followers of Spider also have taken advantage of the Matrix more than more traditional shamas in creating connections. This makes followers more agoraphobic as they avoid uncontrolled social situations and unfamiliar environments. They receive a –1 dice pool modifier to Magic tests while out in the open (this includes very large indoor rooms such as auditoriums, theatres, and stadiums). The penalty doubles if there is a large crowd of people to deal with.

A DINGOBAT ATE MY BABY

So much for this place matching the brochure.

From a safe place off I-40 with the rest of her team, Bradley controlled an inconspicuous Horizon CU^3 drone across a landscape positively dominated by trees. Assuming she hadn't fragged up and misread the map, this was *supposed* to be the Petrified Forest. Last time she visited the place on a grade-school field trip, it was less *forest*—much to her eternal childhood disappointment—and more *badlands* with petrified tree stumps and fallen stone logs. She remembered the stone trees had stunning prismatic mineral deposits that almost, to the imagination of a young troll at the time, seemed like magic given physical shape. But now, via drone optics, she was looking down on the exact polar opposite: leafy boughs of strange trees covering the Zona landscape. It was, in a word, gorgeous—though she'd never admit that to her crew out loud. She had a rep to maintain, and rainbow squees didn't fit the bill.

Zooming in the drone's optics revealed that some of the familiar stumps remained—dots of gray sprinkled with glitter in the noonday sunlight, but that provided little comfort. Trees of this size usually took decades—or longer—to grow, and they had seemingly sprang up overnight. She was of three minds about this development. The would-be botanist in her, the one that adolescence and lack of secondary education had tried really, really hard to kill, wanted to spend time figuring out what the deal was. The leader in her kept harping on botanical analysis not being their mission. And the mundane in her was scared completely drekless by whatever had caused this.

At least they weren't going without a magician on their side this time. Bradley wasn't about to make that mistake again. On the other hand, her physical eyes glanced over at the littering train wreck who called himself Stigma and wondered if he had any inkling at all of what they were wandering into.

She brought the drone in lower, forcing herself to stop admiring the broad leaves and their odd, opalescent sheen, and—

There. A black, furred shape darted out between the trees, ambling along on its simian frame like someone was after it.

A black annis.

Bingo.

It turned, bared huge chimp-like canines at something beyond the drone's scope—and a red, fuzzy dot bloomed from its neck. The creature grasped the fuzz and withdrew a narcoject dart. Wooziness filled its black, beady eyes, but it roared back ... and earned another three darts before withering amid the strange trees. A pair of armed goons in milspec gear approached the animal, looped a catchpole around its neck, and dragged it away and out of sight.

Bradley ensured the drone was on its most quiet operating setting, and slowly followed the goons and their primate prisoner through the forest.

BY PHILIP A. LEE

Bradley, her two teammates, and their unfortunate tagalong followed the trail their targets weren't even bothering to hide. Bradley had already scouted the terrain, so she took point. Bushcraft, in his desert cammie pants, black tank, and jungle-green headband followed her. Lymann, the far-too-practically dressed wildlife expert their employer had insisted come along, trailed Bushcraft, and Stigma—hopefully—brought up the rear. Bradley would have preferred to just hop in her LAV-98 "Devil Rat" and drive the whole team to the target, but sometimes subtlety was best.

"Man oh man oh man, this is gonna be *awesome*," Bushcraft said, both fists clenched, his mud-smeared face lit up like an orphan who'd just been told he was finally getting adopted.

Bradley tried to ignore him during their forest trek, but she knew from experience that such an endeavor was literally impossible. The kid meant well, and he was really good at what he did, so she indulged it for the sake of harmony. Stigma somehow found a way to ignore the kid—but then again the oblivious ork shaman ignored practically everybody, even the team.

But Lymann—he didn't know any better, the poor guy. "What the frag are you so happy about?" he asked.

Bradley thought to jump in and save him the exasperation but decided not to, just for her own amusement.

Bushcraft grinned like Lymann had asked him to tell a story about his favorite childhood memory. "You ever heard of a dingobat?"

"Can't say that I have."

"Ah, it don't surprise me. They're really rare, like pre-Awakening Nessie- or Bigfoot-rare."

"Ah," Lymann said, clearly uninterested.

But once Bushcraft started off on one of his little dingobat tangents, there was absolutely no stopping him. "Anyway, it's like some kind of Awakened wolf-bat hybrid. Some people on the 'trix claim it's only found in Australia—hence the whole 'dingo' part—but that's a load o' bulldrek if I ever heard any."

"Fascinating," Lymann said with bugging eyes any normal metahuman would've understood to mean *I really couldn't care less* or *Please shoot me now*.

"Thing is, the 'dingo' part has nothin at all to do with Oz. Ever hear about that Oz lady back in the Fifth World, the one who went on trial for murdering her young daughter, and her only defense was 'a dingo ate my baby'? Well, she was found innocent because an *actual fragging dingo* just up and dragged the kid away. Dingobats're like that too. They've been known to snatch babies and small animals and just fly off with 'em, smooth as you please."

"*Right*," said Lymann. "Just like those apocryphal tales of giant eagles that run off with purse dogs."

Bushcraft recoiled as though physically struck by offense. "Hey, don't go making fun, *omae*. These things're *real*. And I'm betting there are some around here. Somewhere. They fraggin *love* places like this. Plenty of branches to roost on and stuff."

Lymann smirked. "You got any pictures of these fictitious monsters?"

The survivalist hesitated, worry draining from his face.

"Just like I figured."

Bushcraft shook his head with fervor. "The reason you won't find any *actual* snaps of 'em on the 'trix is 'cause they frag around with electronics—some kinda natural EMP field, like an electric eel or somethin." He sighed in exasperation. "Still—how's it someone from a conservation group ain't never heard of a dingobat? *They're* more an endangered species than these black annis fraggers. Whatever did we bring you along for then?"

Bradley had wanted to ask that same question since they first got here, but she'd decided it impolitic. If Lymann gave the World Wildlife Hedge Fund an unfavorable report, they might not offer her team any more jobs like this. And despite the venue, the WWHF was paying them handsomely to protect these Awakened simians from poachers like these goons somewhere up in the forest ahead.

"I know a lot about black annises," Lyman said. "We don't want you to do something stupid and accidentally kill them."

"Ye of little faith," Bushcraft shot back. "I'll have you know I can track a—"

"Shut it," Bradley cut in and swept her large fist upward to signal a stop.

The eerie forest fell silent around and above her. Movement flashed up ahead. She pointed three times in the direction of the sound, and the party crept quietly after their quarry.

From the brush, Bradley watched the poachers drag the knocked-out black annis to a series of stacked cages in the middle of the forest. Several tents and other temporary structures beneath the thick canopy of leaves marked the rest of the poachers' base, and the two were obviously not alone. There were at least six or seven various folks in view. Some stood guard. Others messed about with the cages, most of which appeared occupied by other black annises.

Bushcraft picked up some detritus from the forest floor. <Okay,> he texted over the team's tacnet, <I'm no botanist or anything, but I know trees. And I have no fragging clue what kind of tree this came from. Judging from the notion that all of this shouldn't be here—maybe it's an extinct species.> He paused and poked at the other bit of debris in his palm. <But this ... This is definitely dingobat spoor.>

Lymann rolled his eyes.

<Gross,> came Stigma's laconic reply.

Bradley witnessed the ork finish the last bite of a bag of Soylent Crisps and then chuck the nonrecyclable plastic wrapper on the ground with all the nonchalance of a someone lounging in an opium den. She shook her head at the irony, but now wasn't the time to chastise the shaman's habits. Instead she picked up a leaf for herself and examined it, then formed a fist around it. To her surprise, the nacreous leaf crumpled and crackled with the sound, feel, and consistency of a hollow eggshell. She wasn't a true tree expert either, but it didn't take a college degree to know a leaf shouldn't do that. It felt like the leaf was just as petrified as the trees they had grown from. No wonder her drones hadn't spotted their base from the air. Whatever these leaves were made of had blocked all of her sensors.

Her Aztechnology Crawler drone crept close enough to show her another pair using a catchpole to lead a slotted-off annis back to one of the empty cages. Smears of blood slicked the creature's lower jaw and neck. <Lymann, what exactly are they doing here?>

<Reagents,> the eco-stooge replied with a shake of his head. <Harvested black annis fangs are good for a lot of things, but the ones here have proven far, far more potent than elsewhere. Must be something in the trees. Anyway, the fangs don't grow back, so these folks just tear out the fangs and eventually dump their sedated bodies back in the forest. And a carnivore without fangs essentially can't eat. So these motherfraggers are dooming the annises to death.>

Through the drone, Bradley observed the two original goons open an empty cage and throw the sedated paracritter inside. Just in time, too—the annis roused enough to swipe an angry claw as Goon Number One tried closing the cage. Blood welled up on the slot's exposed forearm, and he swore while slamming the cage shut.

Lymann chortled in vicious glee. <Oh, he's in for it now. Black annises are drawn to the smell of blood. They're like arboreal sharks in that respect. Better bandage that wound quick, buddy.>

Bushcraft flashed a smirk. <So you're saying we should use him as bait?>

<Maybe, if you guys can pull it off. But I don't think that'll be much of a problem. These guys are rank amateurs. Anyone who knows black annises knows you have to make a display of dominance or they'll come at you, like that guy just learned. You make yourself a big enough threat, and they'll either cower or just turn and bolt.>

<Good to know,> Bradley replied. <All right, here's the plan. I'm going to try hacking the cage locks. The rest of you take out the goon squad when I say go.>

Bushcraft unslung his fiber-composite bow and nocked an arrow with some kind of fancy arrowhead on it. Stigma might've been readying a spell, but it was hard to tell, since he had already started wolfing down another bag of Soylent Crisps.

Lymann shot Bradley a quizzical look. <What about me?>

<You ... you just stay put, all right? Our employers'll be upset if you get yourself geeked.> She glanced around at her teammates and nodded. <All right, give me a few minutes to poke around.>

Tempting as it was to just run in guns blazing, Bradley couldn't guarantee a stray bullet or five wouldn't geek the caged annises. Not that she much cared—she'd heard more than a few stories about folks who'd been brutally murdered and eaten by a black annis. Why anyone would ever want to willingly *pay* to conserve this kind of evil wasn't a question she could answer, but if word got around that one or more annises had died during this mission, the WWHF would never hire her team again. And man, was that paycheck nice. She'd kill annis poachers all across North America if it meant seeing that kind of scratch on a regular basis.

The cage locks were all remote-capable maglocks, presumably to prevent the loss of arms that would accompany getting close enough to use a mechanical key. Easy enough to hack into,

despite Matrix slinging falling outside Bradley's favorite realm of expertise; the trick was in getting them all linked together, on a single trigger.

These slots wouldn't know what hit 'em.

<Ready?> she texted her team. <In three ... two ... one ...>

In her AR window, she mashed the OPEN SESAME button, and the forest stilled with the cacophony of a dozen cage doors clicking open at once. The half-dozen goons in sight perked up like meerkats, guns brandishing.

The one poacher nearest a cage got out an "Oh, drek" before a blackened shape sprang out from the cage and clawed him in a crimson spray.

Then everything went to hell at once.

Nearly a full dozen black annises in various lucid or drugged-up states swarmed from the cages. A *thwipp!* from Bushcraft's bow heralded a bright orange explosion that launched another goon off his feet and the set petrified tree boles and leaves sparkling with kaleidoscopic colors. Two annises set on him as though they hadn't eaten in weeks. An unseen force from Stigma's Clout spell struck a third guy like a cannon, and he flew hard enough to *crack* against a nearby tree. Bradley's Crawler, now on autopilot, shot up a fourth guy while the stone trees echoed around her with disturbing hoots and screeches.

Bradley unloaded on another goon and roadie ran to another tree for a better shot. Lymann—

She scanned the area. Where the flying frag *was* that bastard?

And then she saw him creeping out of the big tent like he'd stolen something. She gritted her teeth and bared a lower tusk. If she'd driven her Devil Rat here, she'd have run him right the frag over.

While her teammates took care of the rest of the poachers, Bradley snuck behind him and leveled her Remington Roomsweeper. "Where the frag you think you're going, *breeder*?"

Lymann straightened and turned around slowly. From one thumb dangled the loop of a neoprene bag printed with the silkscreened words: PROPERTY OF MITSUHAMA MAGICAL SERVICES. "Look, chummer, your job's legit. They'll still pay you. I just want *this*." He shook the bag, and it jingled with the sound of bones.

Black annis fangs.

While Bradley was deciding whether to geek the liar just on principle, a pair of RFID-tagged black annises dashed in before them. The lead annis snuffed menacingly and prowled back and forth in search of an opening.

Lymann turned from Bradley—in hindsight, she should've rabbit punched him right then—and scowled at the paracritters. "Back the frag *off*!" he shouted, and flailed his arms around like a monkey, making himself as big as he possibly could.

But the annis was clearly unimpressed. It reared up and threw its black-furred head back in a screaming rictus of rage to reveal the empty holes where its torn-out canines used to be. But then, two brand-new razor-sharp fangs about the size of Bradley's tusks snapped down to fill the gaps so fast even Bradley flinched.

A dark circle stained the thief's pants.

Both creatures pounced him with inhuman shrieks. Bradley backed up, gun wary, despite the annises seeming less interested in her. The bag of fangs wasn't worth getting mauled over.

Stigma and Bushcraft quickly caught up with her, and they formed a circle beneath the trees.

"We've got a problem," Bushcraft said.

Bradley scanned the stone wood in every direction. "Our new Mitsuhama friends?"

He nocked another arrow and hunched forward in a ready position. "All dead, but they're not what concerns me."

The two annises looked up from Lymann's corpse, their simian muzzles bathed in blood. Then they crept forward. Two more emerged from the scrub to flank them. Bradley whirled at a rustle from behind to see another pair with freshly regrown fangs, their RFID tags glowing in her AR window as they came within range. Two more. Then two more.

The three of them were surrounded.

On second thought, driving in the Devil Rat would've been a better idea. Damned hindsight.

She pointed her Roomsweeper at the nearest pair. Could probably get off a shot or two before they all pounced ...

But then she remembered all of the people she'd lost over the course of her life. Mom. Gramps. Billy. She'd never ever see them again. Her life was just one long string of frag-ups after another, and this one was no different. She rubbed a hand through her hair and had the sudden urge to sink to the ground, curl up into a ball, and let oblivion claim her. The Roomsweeper in her hand was so, so heavy ...

Fangs bared, claws arched for a killing swipe, the nearest black annis lunged—

Her entire AR window fuzzed and then blinked out. The most hideous, ghastly shriek she had ever heard rocked the treetops and turned her guts into ice-cold jelly mere seconds before a darkened shape swooped down from above and blasted her with displaced air.

The annis vanished in a flurry of torn fur and screams. Its remaining companions crouched and looked to the tree branches, chattering in fear and consternation. Then they broke and scattered as though shot from a cannon.

It took her a moment to process what she had seen. A large creature with leathery wings like a bat but with the head and muzzle of what she could only picture as a wolf crossed with a corgi had grasped the human-sized ape and carried it off—presumably to feed its unholy offspring, she mused.

Bushcraft leaped and shot a triumphant fist skyward. "Ha ha! Did you fraggin *see* that? Holy *drek*! I *knew* they were real! I knew it!" He exhaled and slumped forward to catch his breath. "Somebody *please*pleasepleasepleaseplease tell me you got a photo of it ..."

Bradley booted up her crashed Hermes Ikon commlink, but after the point where the annis lunged, all her mission camera showed was static.

PARANORMAL ANIMALS

- Let me just say this is like a dream come true. Back when I was a wee undergrad following Dr. Patterson around like a baby felduck I stumbled across his Guide on the Shadowland BBS during my "hack the planet, save the Earth" phase. I loved the perspective that just a few comments from shadowrunners put on the natural world and the fact that Patterson was giving the man the big finger by sending it over to an anarchist site. Twenty plus years later and now it's my chance to contribute to your walk on the wild side. Enjoy!
- G-Nome

- Stay tuned after the main listing—I've got some info on the Infected that you don't want to miss.
- Red

THE AGGRO INDEX

Each critter in this section (besides the Infected, who sometimes vary from specimen to specimen based on the individual who was Infected and the sapience of the creature) has a score on the Aggro Index, which is my best attempt to scientifically measure something not really measurable—how aggressive a critter is. I have a number of contacts in the field of critter research, and I have polled them over the years about their contact with critters, asking them to rank those critters on a scale of one to ten. I only accepted scores from scientists who have directly contacted the critter or worked with them—no secondhand accounts allowed! I then simply averaged the scores I received. Since all ratings have at least twenty scores as part of the average, I think it's a good picture of just how aggressive you can expect a particular critter to be.

ABRAMS LOBSTER

(HOMARUS IMMANIS)
Terrain: Coastal Saltwater
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 3.5
Length/Height: 1.5 m
Mass: 100 kg

These are, by far, the most delicious of the species I have ever studied. While I don't promote killing for sport, I have little trouble taking my place near the top of the food chain. What might make them seem extra delicious is the difficulty of their capture. Which is actually the reason we ended up having one to eat.

The specimen I was trying to snag for tag and release turned on the crane it was being held by and ended up pulling itself over the deck of the ship and falling among the panicking crew. The resulting conflict left us stranded at sea while they worked on repairs, but it also left the crew and myself with several days of delicious lobster meals.

The research I was doing didn't pan out, as I couldn't get a sufficient number of specimens tagged, but I was able to observe two very interesting events. Both occurred during one of their mating convoys as they headed south to warmer waters. I was witness to a few buoy lines and undersea cables getting snipped by their massive claws as they interfered with the path they were taking. The second was the massive feeding frenzy. The mating convoy was disrupted by a basking shark that was swimming low along the bottom. The abrams only needed a few snips, and the basking shark was short a tail and floundering. The whole line shifted and passed over the dying shark. By the time they were all gone, the sea was a mess of shark bits that had attracted plenty of other scavengers, though none came close while the lobsters were still passing through.

- The shells on these things can stop just about anything. Several enterprising fishermen have devised an underwater charge that can kill or disorient them enough to pull them up out of the water, where they eventually suffocate.
- Kane

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
4	3	2	1	3	4	3	1	2	6

Initiative	5 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x2/+1 (x1/x2/+10 Swimming)
Condition Monitor	9/10
Limits	Physical 7, Mental 5, Social 4
Armor	9H
Skills	Perception 4, Swimming 5, Unarmed Combat 4
Powers	Enhanced Senses (Sonar), Fear, Gestalt Consciousness, Gills, Hardened Armor (9), Immunity (Toxins), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV 9P, AP –4)

AFANC

(CROCODYLUS CYMRI)

Terrain: Swamp
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Nocturnal
Aggro Index: 8.8
Length/Height: 4.5 m
Mass: 375 kg

My first encounter with an afanc was almost my last. Very early in my career, I discovered their hunting prowess and gift for locating prey—in this case, me. Afanc attack large prey by biting them and dragging them down into the water to drown them, much like mundane crocodiles, but smaller prey are often stunned with a tail slap before being eaten or dragged into the water to be buried in the mud and hidden from scavengers. I'm rather small, so I got the tail slap. The hit knocked me out cold, but the security team I was working with cleared it off before I got dragged off. The trideo footage I had rolling showed the fight—a difficult affair—and it showed some of the unique water controlling abilities afancs possess.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
10	4	4	8	4	2	4	2	2	6	4

Initiative	8 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x2/+2
Condition Monitor	13/10
Limits	Physical 10, Mental 4, Social 5
Armor	10H
Skills	Intimidation 4, Perception 5, Running 4, Sneaking 4, Unarmed Combat 8
Powers	Engulf (Water), Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision, Smell), Hardened Armor (10), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV 8P, AP –2), Search

AGROPELTER

(PITHECOCEPHALUS HERMESTES)

Terrain: Forest/urban
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 7.0
Length/Height: 0.91 m
Mass: 22 kg

I'm not prone to developing personal opinions of nature's creations, but the agropelter is a special exception. I hate these bastards. Early research found them non-sapient, despite their similarity in appearance to heavily furred little metahumans, but time has revealed a social evolution among them, particularly with those specimens that spread into barren urban environments. Classified as omnivores, they greatly prefer a meat diet and gain social ranking among their kin by taking down larger prey. This is based solely on the size or weight of the prey, not on its ability to defend itself, meaning a human twelve-year-old that weighs in at forty kilos is a more worthy prize than a wild dog that only weighs thirty-five kilos. All their limbs end in sharply clawed fingers and toes, making them deadly predators. They are also proportioned and muscled for agile brachiation as well as bi- and quadrupedal locomotion, which allows them to come at prey from many directions when hunting in packs.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
2	4	1	2	4	4	1	4	4	6

Initiative	8 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x4/+1
Condition Monitor	9/9
Limits	Physical 4, Mental 5, Social 4
Armor	0
Skills	Blades 2, Clubs 3, Navigation 3 (Underground +2), Perception 2, Running 2, Sneaking 5, Throwing Weapons 3, Unarmed Combat 3
Powers	Brachiation, Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Low-Light Vision, Smell), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV 3P, AP —)

BANDIT

(PROCYON LATRI)

Terrain: Forest/Urban
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Nocturnal
Aggro Index: 2.1
Length/Height: 1.0 m
Mass: 19.6kg

The most interesting part of studying the bandit as a species is discovering the plethora of items they collect. Most of the items have no functional value for the creatures and are simply taken because the bandit is, by its very nature, a kleptomaniac. It collects items from wherever it roams and gathers all of it within its den. The den is usually located in hollowed trees or abandoned burrows for bandits still ranging the wild, but most of the population has shifted to urban areas, and these specimens most often locate abandoned buildings or hide within the less-trafficked areas of occupied dwellings.

During my research their habits resulted in several incidents. They will take anything, ranging in size from an optical chip to an SMG. Both of which I have seen within the cache of bandits in my study. These types of interesting and valuable items often end up in the hands of bandits because they have a knack for grabbing the right item at the wrong time for the original owner.

I observed three specimens that were trained and actually worked to gather valuables for their handlers. I tracked two of them back to their handlers and found they were both squatters in the barrens of Seattle out near Fall City in Redmond. The third managed to evade my tracking, including an electronic tracker.

- Avoided an electronic tracker?! Bulldrek. They aren't that smart. Could it have fallen off accidentally?
- Sticks

- Not likely. The injector dart pumps in thousands of nano-RFIDs. They were working for about ten minutes when I started to lose the signal.
- G-Nome

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
7	4	3	7	3	3	5	3	2	6

Initiative	8 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x3/+2
Condition Monitor	9/10
Limits	Physical 3, Mental 5, Social 5
Armor	1
Skills	Locksmith 5, Perception 6, Sneaking 5, Unarmed Combat 3
Powers	Armor (1), Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Low-Light Vision, Smell)

BEHEMOTH

(ALLIGATOR GIGAS)

Terrain: Swamp
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 6.8/9.6
Length/Height: 5 m/3 m
Mass: 1,950 kg

I'll admit I've never done any in-person close studies on the behemoth due to its uncanny ability to swallow items of my size whole. Instead I've lost a few dozen drones, many of them eaten, in my quest to learn about these kings of the swamp. After the first few drones, I actually started using bait drones to get the behemoth to swallow other drones for some internal investigations. Remarkable scientific knowledge was gained, but more importantly my research revealed that an Ares Hellion high-explosive grenade detonating inside the abdomen of a behemoth will lead to its eventual death, but while dying it will unleash its pain on anything in its path.

Awakened from the common alligator, the behemoth actually looks like a giant hippopotamus wearing an alligator costume. Its legs are extremely long compared to its progenitor species, leading to overland speeds similar to a horse despite the claims of poor land movement offered by less-thorough research. Its lack of a significant tail limits its swimming speed but still allows for quick lunges from the water while attacking prey that is often impaled on the creature's massive tusks before being dragged into the water to drown or bleed out. Tough to figure out which happens first.

The behemoth is both territorial and an aggressive hunter. Anything entering its domain will be attacked, even small watercraft. The attack is not directed at destroying the vehicle, but rather overturning it and spilling out its delicious fillings. Food taken while defending its territory will be stored at its nest. During mating season this stock of food is often used by males to entice mates. Mating season also spikes their aggression, and anything that enters their domain will be attacked.

- Behemoth domains in the backwaters of Louisiana and Florida have become great places to scavenge from the boats that get left behind after a behemoth turns their owner into a mating gift. Just need to keep the sonar active and look for anything big moving against the current.
- Kane

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
18	4	3	18	3	3	2	5	1	3

Initiative	5 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x4/+1
Condition Monitor	19/11
Limits	Physical 18, Mental 4, Social 5
Armor	15H
Skills	Perception 4, Sneaking 4, Swimming 5, Unarmed Combat 7
Powers	Hardened Armor (15), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV 21P, AP –2), Toughness (4)

BLACK ANNIS

(MANDRILLUS ANNISAE)

Terrain: Forest/Underground
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Nocturnal
Aggro Index: 8.9
Length/Height: 1.7 m
Mass: 75 kg

The black annis was long believed to be an Awakened relative of the mandrill, but researchers could not understand how it became native to North America without a counterpart in the natural mandrill populations of Africa. It is mysteries like these that drive me every day to continue my pursuits of Awakened biology. I am currently planning an expedition into a region of the Rocky Mountains that my research indicates is the origin location of the black annis. These are the locations of the earliest sightings, though the populations quickly spread due to the highly territorial nature of these creatures.

The black annis is a solitary predator. The only time you will find more than one of these creatures in a single territory is during the mating season or if a challenge is occurring. During mating season, the females come to the males; after copulation, they are quickly sent away. Challenges among these creatures are frequent and begin with howls and rock throwing. To be clear, only other black annises get challenges. Anything else gets attacked if the black annis thinks it can win. This occurs with almost everything except for bears and their Awakened kin.

Black annises are dangerous foes. The young are capable hunters within a week of birth. Mothers abandon their young around this time, and the juvenile black annis must locate a new territory, developing its skills at stealth while moving to unclaimed ground. The fight to return to its birthplace usually begins once the black annis reaches sexual maturity, which occurs around five months of age. This is when challenges occur, and the more powerful black annises in a region push in toward where they were born.

- So that means you could be facing the meanest of the mean when you head to where you think they all started, right? If you don't mind trophy-takers on your expedition, I'd be happy to lend my gun for a chance to bag the king of the black annises.
- Ironworker

- Sorry, Ironworker. I hire security. I don't run hunting parties. The offer is appreciated.
- G-Nome

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
8	4	5	9	3	2	3	2	2	6	4

Initiative	8 + 2D6
Movement	x1/x4/+1
Condition Monitor	15/10
Limits	Physical 11, Mental 4, Social 5
Armor	4
Skills	Gymnastics 4, Intimidation 5, Perception 5, Running 5, Sneaking 6, Unarmed Combat 7
Powers	Armor (4), Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision), Fear, Natural Weapon (Bite/Claws: DV 9P, AP –), Toughness (3)
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Mild)

BLOOD MONKEY

(ATELES SANGUINE)

Terrain: Jungle
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 8.6
Length/Height: 0.51 m (0.75 m tail)
Mass: 9.4 kg

The blood monkey is an Awakened brown spider monkey (*Ateles hybridus*). Its name comes not only from its deep crimson color but also from its need to ingest blood. The monkey is not infected by HMHVV but rather has a nutritional deficiency that is filled by blood. These animals travel in groups of four to twenty creatures to hunt, and they will attack anything that they can make bleed. Their claws are razor-sharp and secrete an anti-coagulant that keeps wounds open and bleeding. The monkeys have an interesting tongue that has a hollow tube in the center they use to suck up blood from anywhere it spills. I've actually seen a few of these creatures be trained and accompany cartel members in Amazonia.

- Rumors say the cartel uses the monkeys to clean up the blood after they kill or torture someone. I'm not entirely sure all the blood draining occurs after the fact.
- Picador

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
3	6	3	4	4	2	2	3	2	6	5

Initiative	5 + 2D6
Movement	x1/x2/+1 (x2/x4/+2 Brachiation)
Condition Monitor	9/10
Limits	Physical 5, Mental 4, Social 5
Armor	2
Skills	Gymnastics 8, Perception 5, Track (Smell) 4 (+2), Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Armor (2), Brachiation, Confusion, Enhanced Senses (Smell [Blood], low-light vision), Natural Weapon (Claw, DV 6P, AP –2), Paralyzing Touch, Secretion (Anti-coagulant), Wall Walking
Weaknesses	Dietary Requirement (Blood), Fragile (2)

CENTAUR

(EQUUS SAGITTARIUS)

Terrain: Grasslands/Forests
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: (Sapient)
Length/Height: 2.75 m
Mass: 450 kg

Centaurs are a member of the equine family, with a lower body resembling a horse and a hominid torso attached where the horse head would be. A centaur typically stands 2.7 to 3.2 meters tall and weighs between four hundred and one thousand kilos. Most of the vari-

ation comes from the horse body, which may resemble several different breeds of common horse (*Equus ferus*). Centaurs possess only three digits and an opposable thumb on each hand, and the skull shape can vary within the species.

The common centaur, known to metahumanity since shortly after the Awakening, has a primarily equine head similar to a horse but shortened slightly in length. A second variation of the species, much like the varieties of metahuman subspecies, has a human head. These "lesser centaurs," as other centaurs refer to them, rarely reach adulthood, as they are generally cast out of their tribes and left to fend for themselves. A few have been taken in by kind-hearted centaurs, metahumans, other metasapient species, and at least one dragon, and have survived to adulthood outside of their regular culture.

Though centaurs have long been considered primitive, this view is not entirely fair or accurate. While centaurs generally desire to maintain their simple tribal lifestyle and live in their natural habitats, they are quite capable of sophisticated thought and understanding of modern technology. Several common centaurs and many lesser centaurs have begun to explore metahuman society and demonstrated a solid facility with adapting as needed. Of particular note are the Prairie Boys, a band completely composed of common centaurs; Rouge Bitless, a lesser centaur professional fighter; and Milo Czerda, a Nobel laureate and member of the Draco Foundation's board of trustees. Other centaurs serve in mercenary units, work on rural farms, or act as guides or trackers thanks to their innate magical tracking sense. Though they are capable of integrating into many parts of metahuman society, most simply choose not to.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
7	3	3	7	3	3	3	3	1	6	3

Initiative	6 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x6/+6
Condition Monitors	12/10
Limits	Physical 8, Mental 4, Social 5
Armor	4
Skills	Close Combat skill group 4, Etiquette 4 (Tribal +2), Outdoors skill group 4, Perception 5, Running 7, Sneaking 3
Qualities	Magic Sense (p. 116, *Run Faster*)
Powers	Armor (4), Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision, Thermographic Vision), Natural Weapon (Kick: DV 9P, AP +1, +1 Reach), Sapience, Search
Weaknesses	Uneducated

CERBERUS HOUND

(CANIS CERBERI)

Terrain: Forest/Mountain
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 7.8
Length/Height: 1.2 m
Mass: 110 kg

As they say, three heads are better than one. The Cerberus hound is easily identified by its trio of canine heads. These beasts are fierce hunters, capable of attacking with all three heads at once, increasing the chances of one getting a good chunk, or a strong hold. Smart prey will run away, but smart does not always save one's hoop. The Cerberus hound is well-known for running down prey over long distances once it is on the trail. This long-range hunt is aided by the creature's paranatural ability to move quickly and unhindered through any terrain.

Captive hounds have been trained and used for corporate installation security on a few occasions. Their relentless desire to hunt down prey once they have been chosen makes control of the animals difficult, but security firms have started using Cerberus hounds to track runners who have stolen valuables from facilities by releasing the trained hounds once they are on the scent and activating a tracking collar.

Normal studies of the Cerberus hound have been hindered greatly by both their rarity and their ability to move within their environment. Attempts to place tracking devices on hounds have met with no success and frequent terrible results. Animals that are subdued wake and immediately begin hunting the scents of anything they don't recognize. Animals that are tagged consider their attacker their next target, and while a few have been tagged this way, anyone who knows anything about Cerberus hounds will warn runners off jobs like this.

- These things will track you much farther than you would ever expect. I actually took one of those jobs to tag a cerberus and hit it with the double whammy dart of narcoject and a tracker. Within a few hours, I had collected payment and was on my way from Greece to Russia for another potential job. The Cerberus I'd tagged caught up with me in the northern Carpathians. Needless to say, whoever was tracking it lost contact, but that's only because it severed my cyberarm rather than my real arm with its first bite.
- Ironworker

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
8	4	5	6	4	2	6	3	2	6	5

Initiative	11 + 3D6
Movement	x2/x6/+3
Condition Monitor	7/10
Limits	Physical 8, Mental 5, Social 6
Armor	4
Skills	Intimidation 5, Perception 8, Running 6, Sneaking 6, Tracking 6, Unarmed Combat 8
Powers	Armor (4), Concealment (Self), Corrosive Spit, Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Low-Light Vision, Smell, Thermographic Vision), Fear, Immunity (Cold, Fire), Movement (Self), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV 6P, AP –), Search, Toughness (6)

DEATHRATTLE

(CROTALUS NEX)

Terrain: Desert
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Nocturnal
Aggro Index: 6.8
Length/Height: 2.1 m
Mass: 20.4 kg

Studies of the deathrattle are steeped in errors due to the physical similarities to their progenitor species, *crotalus adamanteus*, the diamondback snake. Oh wait, that's one of the first mistakes. There are *two* progenitor species, *c. adamanteus* and *c. atrox*, the eastern and western diamondback snakes. The deathrattle is nearly identical to these species during development and gains its more distinctive head growth of thicker plates, almost like a crown, once they exceed 1.5 meters in length. I hypothesize that the change length is actually one-half pi, but my research is not complete. Many diamondbacks reach this size, making identification difficult before this point.

Two key methods of identification prior to crown development are venom analysis and verification of the venom spitting behavior found only in the deathrattle. Neither a pleasant option. The deathrattle's venom is not only deadly but causes extreme pain in the victim. Thus my second line of investigation that has revealed a dietary requirement, secondary advantage, and weakness within the species. The pain-inducing factors within the venom increase the target's endorphin production, a requirement for deathrattle survival. The additional endorphin intake results in a higher tolerance to pain within the species. Their need for endorphins allowed me to use opiate-binding chemicals to inhibit the availability of the hormone and significantly slow and weaken the subjects.

Recent studies, post 2063, have also shown some deathrattles have gained a toughness to their hide. This

protective layer is arcane in nature, as the armoring effect does not continue after death. While early research presumed this to be a SURGE characteristic, the trait has been found in nearly all subjects studied in recent years. This could be due to evolutionary advantage or simply a rise in ambient mana allowing for another aspect of their Awakening.

While listed as predators, they are just as often the prey, as the deathrattle is a frequent target for talisleggers since they possess a myriad of valuable arcane components.

- Deathrattles are a goldmine for talismongers. DeathBlood, RattleBite, scales and tails for reagents, venom, and dozens of other things can be made from their scaly hides.
- Lyran

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
3	6	6	6	7	3	5	2	2	6	4

Initiative	13+3D6
Movement	x1/x2/+1
Condition Monitor	10/9
Limits	Physical 7, Mental 3, Social 4
Armor	6
Skills	Exotic Ranged Weapon: Venom Spit 5, Intimidation 6, Perception 4, Sneaking 3, Swimming 3, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Armor (6), Enhanced Senses (Thermographic Vision), Immunity (Pain, Toxins), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV 5P, AP –1), Venom (Vector: Contact, Injection, Speed: 1 minute, Penetration: –3, Power: 10, Effect: Agony, Disorientation, Nausea, Physical Damage)
Note	–1 Reach

DEATHSPIRAL BUTTERFLY

(CALIGO CORPUS)

Terrain: Forest/Urban
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 0.2
Length/Height: 0.24 m (0.68 m wingspan)
Mass: 0.053 kg

The above is not a typo—this is a carnivorous butterfly. Specimens are much larger than even the biggest mundane butterfly species. They are generally non-aggressive but will attack living targets when freshly out of chrysalis or during the height of their breeding period. While their size is an obvious distinctive marking, their wings, red and black in all the specimens I have studied, bear a spiral pattern that starts at the head and swirls around the wings with varying thicknesses.

Deathspiral butterflies usually feed off carcasses, which is also the same place they lay their eggs, and where their larvae develop. None of those activities are limited to the deceased. The deathspiral inject larvae into living subjects, often without the subject knowing, since their feeding proboscis also acts as their ovipositor. The larvae begin to grow and ingest nearby tissue while also excreting a local anesthetic that prevents the subject from feeling their presence. Wild animals rarely notice and many in the domain of the deathspiral bear multiple scars from where a butterfly erupted. There are many others who don't survive the process when they are set upon by multiple deathspirals, usually during their mating frenzies.

- They inject eggs quickly, often at the same time as a bite for a little tissue drainage. Get checked after any encounter.
- Butch

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
1	4	5	1	4	2	4	6	2	6	6

Initiative	9 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x1/+1 (x2/x3/+1 Flight)
Condition Monitor	2/10
Limits	Physical 3, Mental 4, Social 8
Armor	0
Skills	Flight 3, Perception 3, Unarmed Combat 3
Powers	Enhanced Senses (Smell), Natural Weapon (Proboscis: DV 2P, AP –4), Venom (Vector: Injection, Speed: Instant, Penetration: –4, Power: 2, Effect: Physical Damage, Egg implantation (1d6), Special)
Weaknesses	Fragile (7)
Note	–1 Reach, Special (Daily: 6S resisted with Body; one week: eggs erupt for 1P unresisted and 2P normal damage)

DEMON RAT

(RATTUS DIABOLIS NOVO)

Terrain: Urban
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 10
Length/Height: 0.9 m (1m tail)
Mass: 5 kg

First off, let me correct a few points from above. Terrain should read, "Wherever the frag it wants!" Diet should read, "Whatever the frag it wants!" Aggro Index should read twenty on a scale of ten, because they go out looking for a fight.

The demon rat is the larger, furrier, smarter, and nastier cousin of the devil rat. They popped up shortly after '61 and were quickly identified as a SURGE variant of the devil rat. They are able to control devil rats and normal rats. Their easiest identifiers are the small horns over its eyes. Despite the fact that they will eat anything, they tend to avoid any kind of cannibalism, including even other rodents, preferring to hunt and bring down more dangerous prey such as dogs or even metahuman children rather than rodents of any kind.

As previously discovered by Dr. Anatole Varkov, the demon rat has three variant subspecies: alpha, beta, and gamma. The alpha variant is the basic demon rat. The

beta carries a potent strain of VITAS-3. The gamma exhibits regenerative abilities similar to shifter species. A fourth variant has recently been reported that possesses an electrical projection power.

A final point on the interesting nature of the demon rat is the extensive number of variations that have popped up among its expressions around the world. The SURGE of demon rats does not seem to be over. Besides the consistent version that possesses the ability to electrocute its prey, specimens have arose with a myriad of abilities from hardened armor plates to adaptive coloration.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
5	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	3	6	0

Initiative	10 + 2D6
Movement	x1/x3/+1
Condition Monitor	11/10
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 6, Social 7
Armor	2
Skills	Exotic Ranged Weapon: Corrosive Spit 5, Gymnastics 5, Perception 5, Running 3, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Animal Control (Devil Rats, Rats), Armor (2), Concealment, Corrosive Spit, Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision), Gestalt Consciousness, Immunity (Pathogens, Toxins), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV 5P, AP +1)
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Moderate)
Note	–1 Reach. Beta variant: Add Pestilence; Gamma variant: Add Regeneration; Epsilon variant: Elemental Attack (Electricity)

DEVIL JACK DIAMOND

(LEPISOSTEUS ADAMANTICUS)

Terrain: Freshwater rivers
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 6.8
Length/Height: 3.1 m
Mass: 150 kg

I was first drawn to perform research on these fish when a close friend was injured during a sport-fishing event. A sport that usually sees muscle strains and misplaced fishhooks as its worst injuries cost my associate his arm from the elbow down when a specimen decided that rather than fight the reel, he would swim in fast and attack.

This is actually a frequent occurrence and the reason that this species is the gold medal of sport-fishing prizes, and why those fishing in waters the devil jack diamond frequents often carry a sidearm while fishing. Though any specimen injured with a weapon during an event is disqualified from records and sport trophies.

The DJD will often float at the top of the water in similar fashion to alligators, but their narrow form and massive length combined with the vast amount of detritus in their region, make them extremely hard to distinguish from fallen trees. This level of stealth, combined with their powerful swimming ability and agility, and their heightened level of aggression toward any extensive disturbance in the water, make them the most dangerous thing in the waters of the Mississippi and its tributary rivers.

- St. Louis has active bounties on the DJD, but only those caught in the rivers directly around the city. They use chemical testing to determine what waters the DJD is from and have an extensive collection of specimens from portions of the river from Minnesota to Louisiana, and many of the tributaries.
- Pistons

- Many of those specimens were acquired by yours truly. After the incident I did some sport fishing of my own.
- G-Nome

- Thought you weren't a trophy hunter.
- Ironworker

- All the specimens I brought in were alive. Their ability to float like an alligator clued me in to their ability to move water over their gills rather than forcing it via swimming. I was able to tranquilize them for capture and transport. There are still a lot of places that have not provided specimens, and the city pays well for the first from any area.
- G-Nome

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
5	4	5	5	2	1	3	2	2	6	4

Initiative	8 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Condition Monitor	11/9
Limits	Physical 7, Mental 3, Social 4
Armor	10
Skills	Perception 5, Swimming 6, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Armor (10), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV 5P, AP –2)

DROP BEAR

(PHASCOLARCTOS HEMOLUS)

Terrain: Forest
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Nocturnal
Aggro Index: 8.0
Length/Height: 0.80 m
Mass: 12 kg

An Awakened version of the koala, the drop bear is distinguished from its mundane cousin by its jet-black

fur and razor-sharp teeth and claws. They're omnivorous, eating eucalyptus like ordinary koalas, but they also enjoy some fresh flesh every once in awhile. They don't hunt their prey, but rather wait for it to come to them. Once a suitable victim appears underneath the branches of the tree the drop bear inhabits, it drops down and attacks with its rather large claws and nasty teeth, hence the name.

The drop bear is a carrier for HMHVV II. While not Infected itself, there is an ever-increasing number of cases in which surviving victims have contracted the disease. It's such a problem in Australia that local municipalities have active bounties out on drop bears, which is not a normal thing in the eco-friendly Outback nation.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
3	3	3	5	5	2	4	1	2	6	3

Initiative	7 + 2D6
Movement	x1/x2/+1
Condition Monitor	10/11
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 5, Social 5
Armor	2
Skills	Gymnastics 4, Perception 5, Sneaking 5, Unarmed Combat 4
Qualities	Carrier (HMHVV-II; p. 141, Run Faster)
Powers	Adaptive Coloration, Armor (2), Immunity (Pathogens, Toxins), Natural Weapons (Claw/Bite: DV 5P, AP –1)
Weaknesses	Dietary Requirement (Eucalyptus)
Note	–1 Reach

FENRIR WOLF

(CANIS LUPUS AESIRI)

Terrain: Forest
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Nocturnal
Aggro Index: 7.8
Length/Height: 2.2m
Mass: 150 kg

As if wolves that were well shy of a meter at the back weren't frightening enough, especially when traveling in packs, fenrir wolves travels in packs with the same numbers and stand a meter and a half at the back. These things are huge!

I had to get a special authorization from S-K to do my research on the fenrirs of Germany—I basically ran a couple of free ops for them, and they let me put my hoop at risk wandering around the wolves' territory. I didn't gain anything new beyond the previous research. Packs have both a male and female alpha; they travel in groups of six to twelve; the female alpha has up to a half dozen pups in the den at a time; females are smaller than males, they have similar coloration variations to their mundane progenitors; alpha males kill off the weakest pups; and they are hyper-aggressively territorial.

I was able to scientifically confirm the presence of their ability to induce a flight response, usually referred to as a Fear power. Many runners find this to be one of the most embarrassing aspects of facing off against paranormal animals, but I accept it as a scientific effect and not some question of my manhood. The problem is not just their ability to make you run scared; Fenrir wolves are masters of their territory, and they use it skillfully and knowledgeably. They make you run and you go right off a cliff, into brambles, straight into a narrow trap, or right into the jaws of the pack.

- These things are frequently used as security support, and those pack tactics are part of the game plan. Sec trainer takes the pack alpha spot and runs the show.
- Hard Exit

- Some DNI work has been going on to set sec trainers up with direct connections. Translation is the toughest part, but some success has been found with deep-immersion extended connections. MCT, Evo, and S-K have the best programs, but word in the shadows has Ordo Maximus pushing the limits at a few delta clinics they operate.
- Icarus

- Those clinics are operated by those same corps, they just have OM money funding them and siphoning off all the best research.
- Mr. Bonds

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
7	5	4	8	5	2	5	2	2	6	5

Initiative	9 + 2D6
Movement	x2/x6/+3
Condition Monitor	2/11
Limits	Physical 9, Mental 5, Social 5
Armor	6
Skills	Counterspelling 5, Intimidation 4, Perception 5, Running 5, Sneaking 5, Tracking 5, Unarmed Combat 6
Powers	Armor (6), Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Low-Light Vision, Smell), Fear, Magical Guard (Self), Natural Weapon (Bite/Claws: DV 10P, AP —)

GARGOYLE

(GARGOYLE SAXI)

Terrain: Mountains, Urban
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Nocturnal
Aggro Index: 7.3
Length/Height: 2.0 m
Mass: 200 kg

Despite the fact that the gargoyle was one of the earliest species discovered after the Awakening, there is still very little known about them. Specimens available for study have all appeared male in the mammalian sense, but exact taxonomy of the species makes this physical appearance mean very little. Visual confirmations of

variants with two, four, or six mammae, no wings, and more slender feminine shapes lend credence to the existence of females, but no gargoyle juveniles or infants have ever been identified.

Typical hunting behavior consists of stalking prey from a high vantage point before making a fly-by strike with their razor-sharp claws backed by the force of gravity. They usually go after prey small enough to be carried off, which includes juvenile metahumans. Larger prey are sometimes attacked by groups of gargoyles, but the creatures are not usually social.

Research has shown an increase in these social behaviors among urban gargoyles alongside a rise in unique adaptations and arcane talents. My research experience has revealed spellcasting abilities, venom secretions, and adaptive coloration.

- Projection powers, invisibility, and thicker hides are three of the most common rumors I've heard, but all of those can be explained by spellcasting abilities. Which, if accurate, drastically changes my thoughts on gargoyles.
- Hard Exit

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
10	4	5	10	4	3	4	1	1	6	5

Initiative	9 + 2D6
Movement	x1/x3/+2 (x2/x4/+2 Flight)
Condition Monitor	16/10
Limits	Physical 12, Mental 4, Social 4
Armor	15
Skills	Flight 5, Perception 5, Sneaking 6, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Armor (15), Concealment (Self), Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision), Natural Weapon (Bite/Claws: DV 10P, AP –2), Noxious Breath, Toughness (3)
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Mild), Vulnerability (Iron)

GOMATIA

(CHAMAELEO JACKSONII GOMATUS)

Terrain: Jungle
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 1.2
Length/Height: 1.0 m (0.8 m tall)
Mass: 25 kg

I truly enjoyed the six months I spent studying these Awakened chameleons in the wild. They have almost completely supplanted the population of their precursor species and even include the remaining chameleons as a regular part of their diet. Gomatias hunt using stealth to get close and then strike with their super-sticky tongue. The tongue can extend up to three meters on a fully grown adult. Once caught by the tongue, the prey is quickly dragged back into the gomatia's waiting mouth and crushed in its powerful jaws, which I rated using drone sensors at an average of 10,206 kPa.

- Just as a reference for non-bio-geeks, the tiger only puts out about 7,200 kPa. And remember, these lizards are the size of a dog.
- Slamm-0!

While deadly to anything they think they can eat when they're hungry, gomatias are remarkably non-aggressive the majority of the time. When they have young around, they will attack anything they see as a threat, often employing innovative tactics like snagging dirt or rocks in their tongue and lashing out to throw it into the eyes or face of a would-be attacker. The move is rarely deadly, or even truly damaging, but it gets the point across that they aren't easy prey.

Their normally calm demeanor and interesting appearance has led them into the world of domesticated pets. Once a gomatia has settled into a family, it defends them like its own, even attacking larger foes when it feels threatened. Security corps have worked to use this to their advantage, but runners don't usually back down after you throw dirt in their face.

- They do after the last five centimeters of a gomatia's tongue are replaced with a smart blade. The tongue moves three meters in under thirty thousandths of a second. That's one hundred meters per second. And it usually hits the target in the face.
- Sticks

- That augmentation plays havoc with the gomatia's eating habits, so they often live only a few months after it's applied. It's not that expensive, and security supervisors often think its worth it to keep intruders on their toes.
- DangerSensei

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
6	3	1	6	3	2	6	1	2	6	3

Initiative	7 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x3/+1
Condition Monitor	11/10
Limits	Physical 7, Mental 5, Social 4
Armor	3
Skills	Gymnastics 4, Perception 4, Sneaking 6, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Adaptive Coloration, Armor (3), Binding, Enhanced Senses (Touch, 360-Degree Vision), Immunity (Toxins), Natural Weapon (Tongue: DV 3S, AP –), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV 12P, AP -2)
Weaknesses	Reduced Senses (Hearing, Smell)

HARPY

(HARPYRIA GREGARIA)

Terrain: Forest/Urban
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Diurnal

Aggro Index: 1.2/8.8
Length/Height: 1.2m (1.0m tail)
Mass: 40 kg

Years of study have gone in to discovering the progenitor species for the harpy with no success. Rumors within the parazoology community often talk about pre-Crash databases that had the early research, but no one can locate them, and none of the researchers who did early work on understanding harpies have come forward. That made me really want to know more. Due to the amalgamation of creatures that seem contribute parts to the anatomy of a harpy, I had a lot of ground to cover. They have a homonid face that seems contorted into a permanent raging scowl, large bat-like ears and wings (six meters tip to tip!), thick fur over their backs and legs, a thick, rat-like tail, and feet similar to a raptor. All harpies sighted to date have two mammae, creating the false impression that they are all female. All mammals have mammae, some just aren't stuffed as full of fat and glands. Male appearing subjects with less protruding mammae have been discovered among the populations of Seattle.

My research has been based on historical analysis of sightings and spread. While not conclusive, there are a few anomalies—I believe the progenitor species to be none other than the common brown bat (*Myotis lucifugus*), though its size and behaviors definitely deserve both the new genus and species.

Scientists have noted for years that harpies are quite capable of bringing down their own prey but prefer to function as scavengers. While this appears true on the surface, harpies bring down plenty of prey—they just don't do it with tooth and claw. The harpy is considered a disease carrier, but the specific diseases often vary, and some are completely unidentifiable. Parazoologists argue over the cause, but a toxin-producing power is likely at work. Harpies kill local wildlife and then pick up the carcasses and return them to their nesting areas.

Last point to make about those nesting areas, which can be caves or forest patches in the wilds or power towers and abandoned skyscrapers in the cities: *stay away*! Harpies become hyper-aggressive when defending their nesting area, and as they tend to nest in groups of between twenty and one hundred individuals, it's bad

news for even the toughest razorboy. Worst part is getting out might not mean survival—just a slower death.

- Keep an eye on the sky after you've had a run-in with a harpy. If you've been plagued, they know, and they'll follow you from a distance until you drop.
- Butch

- Sometimes they come in for the kill if it's taking too long.
- Sticks

- If food is scarce, they hunt in packs.
- Stone

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
4	5	4	4	2	2	3	1	1	6	4

Initiative	7 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x2/+1 (x2/x4/+2 Flight)
Condition Monitor	9/9
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 3, Social 4
Armor	2
Skills	Flight 4, Perception 3, Unarmed Combat 3
Powers	Armor (2), Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision), Immunity (Pathogens), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV 6P, AP –1), Pestilence (VITAS-3)
Weaknesses	Fragile (1)

HORNED BEAR

(URSUS AMERICANUS CORNUDA)

Terrain: Forest/Urban
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 2.4/10.0
Length/Height: 3.61 m
Mass: 825 kg

As the black bear is to a human, the horned bear is to a troll. I use that comparative analogy for the piasma as well, but don't confuse the two—they're totally different species. Though if metahumans were more primitive, we'd probably classify elves, orks, dwarfs, and trolls as different species too. Likely, the evolution of bears led to some earlier genetic or social segregation that isolated the horned bears from the piasma (probably the crappy attitude the piasma have), and each ended up respectively within the population of their current progenitors.

The horned bear is a larger but more friendly(ish) Awakened species. They are highly intelligent and extremely social creatures when food competition is not a concern. While they are territorial they defend their territory with honor. When an aggressor threatens a horned bear's territory, this species starts with a simple threat display. If a fight is necessary, the horned bear actually tries to render its opponent unconscious rather than killing it outright. The bear then waits for its foe to awaken. If the foe chooses to try to fight again rather than va-

cating the area, the horned bear gains its next meal. If the defeated foe leaves, it lives to fight another day. The horned bear also has a great memory and won't take kindly to a second visit. No second chances.

- I came across a horned bear and didn't get no honorable combat. Thing came straight at me for the kill. I only got clear because I know when to run. Thing chased me for a full klick before it backed off.
- Balladeer

- It could have mistaken you for another metahuman or you could have been near its den and it had cubs. They display additional aggression when cubs are present.
- G-Nome

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
11	4	4	11	6	4	4	1	2	6	5

Initiative	8 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x8/+2
Condition Monitor	18/11
Limits	Physical 15, Mental 6, Social 5
Armor	10
Skills	Astral Combat 5, Gymnastics 3, Intimidation 6, Perception 4, Running 3, Tracking 4, Unarmed Combat 6
Powers	Armor (10), Dual Natured, Enhanced Senses (Smell), Influence, Natural Weapon (Claws/Bite: DV 13P or 13S, AP –2), Toughness (3)
Weaknesses	Reduced Senses (Sight)
Note	+2 Reach

JUGGERNAUT

(DASYPUS PRAEGRANDIS)

Terrain: Forest/Grassland/Desert
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 2.5/9.9
Length/Height: 16.5 m
Mass: 7,500 kg

Even though so many live in fear of this hulking monstrosity, it is not an aggressive predatory hunter despite what the UCAS said while corrupting Patterson's work. While it has caused plenty of death and destruction since it was first discovered, these are primarily a result of accident or self-defense. One of two Awakened forms of the Texas armadillo (*Dasypus novemcinctus*), the average juggernaut grows to be as large as a coach bus, with the largest specimens observed reaching over twenty meters in length. The juggernaut's size and habits lead to frequent issues with urbanized areas throughout the Pueblo Corporate Council and northern Aztlan. The animal is attracted to the presence of food, which to a juggernaut is just about anything. They have little concept of buildings or other man-made structures and will dig into and break apart buildings to get to the food inside. While moving through a town or city, their massive form is often too large for streets and alleys, but it manages it by mangling and sometimes collapsing the structures on both sides of the street.

When attacked and injured (juggernaut do not consider attacks that don't hurt to be threatening), the juggernaut seeks to flee. If that is not possible, their solution is complete devastation until the attacks cease. A rampaging juggernaut is a sight to behold. Though everything a juggernaut does is a sight to behold.

From my personal studies I've discovered the nature of several juggernaut mysteries. Their ability to switch their biofunctions between anaerobic and aerobic respiration is a result of their biosymbiosis with bacteria, which is also the source of their ability to break down inorganic biomatter. The low IR signature of the juggernaut is also caused by this relationship, as the processes to digest the inorganic materials are endothermic and require the use of heat delivered from the plates into the gut. Low nighttime temperatures in desert areas often lead juggernauts to cities, where dark surfaces retain heat longer than desert sands and artificial heat sources abound.

- Nice to see someone trying to do right by nature and help people understand the creatures we share this place with. The juggernaut has been the great white shark of the land for too long, misunderstood and attacked for no better reason than man's fear of a powerful beast.
- Ecotope

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
20	6	5	42	5	1	2	1	4	6	6

Initiative	8 + 1D6
Movement	x3/x5/+4
Condition Monitor	30/13
Limits	Physical 37, Mental 5, Social 6
Armor	18H
Skills	Perception 4, Running 7, Unarmed Combat 4
Powers	Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Smell, Motion Detection), Fear, Hardened Armor (18), Immunity (Cold, Fire, Pathogens, Toxins), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV 42P, AP –4), Toughness (12)
Weaknesses	Reduced Senses (Sight)
Note	+4 Reach

MARTICHORAS

(MARTICHORAS HASTAE)

Terrain: Forest
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 3.2–8.4
Length/Height: 2.1 m (0.54 m tail)
Mass: 178 kg

My intense love of parabiology was first instilled in me by a rare sighting of a wild martichoras near Yel-

lowstone when I was a young man of only eight. The specimen my family came across was majestic and terrifyingly fantastic all at once. I followed research on this paraspecies for my entire life and have been at the forefront of recent research into the rising population of winged martichoras.

The species has a shaggy golden brown coat with a distinctive darkening in coloration that runs down their flanks. Males possess a thick, dark mane that extends down the center of their back. They greatly resemble the lion they Awakened from in the muzzle, but their mouth is filled with layered rows of sharp, shark-like teeth. The end of their tail is also varied by the presence of a sharp set of venomous quills. The latest evolution of the martichoras has been large, bat-like wings that not only allow controlled gliding but also legitimate flight.

Socially they function in prides, with a single female in control of four to ten adult males. Juvenile males and females from the pride family are part of the pride as well. As they mature, females are quickly pushed out to form their own pride. Young males tend to strike out on their own and survive in solitude until they find a female to accept them.

Females in the process of building a pride are often not picky about the males they choose early on, as they simply need hunters to bring in food. Over time males will develop their own hierarchy within the pride that occasionally results in the death of a weaker male and space for a female to bring in more potential mates.

Males are the hunters, but they never immediately eat prey they have killed. All prey is brought to the female first, then hunters can eat, and finally the young are allowed to dine on the remaining scraps.

The development of wings has been a favorable adaptation for their standard hunting practices. The martichoras has long been a climber. They ascend trees and wait in ambush for prey to come below, where they pounce down, dig in with thick front claws, rake repeatedly with their rear claws, and bite down, usually over the skull or spine. Wings have allowed an expansion of their hunting grounds outside of dense forests, increased control in diving from heights within dense forests, as well as allowed an increase in the height they can dive from. The quills of their tail are venomous but never used for hunting, only personal defense. Creatures killed by their quills are left and never taken as food due to the toxicity of the meat after death. Martichoras are not immune to their own venom.

Levels of aggression within the species vary greatly. The least aggressive are adult females who already have a pride. They are capable killers but rely on the males of their pride to attack prey and threats. Females in the process of developing a pride run from most threats but will defend a location they have chosen as their den. Young are next and tend to attack things they think are edible and not too large. Males looking for a pride to join are aggressive as they seek to prove themselves to potential females. Males within a pride are the most aggressive as they defend their female, their territory, and their own position in the hierarchy.

- The NAN have been having a lot of issues with these things lately. They don't fear people and have been expanding their own territory within the forests of the nations as well as the cities and settlements abandoned by Anglos.
- Mika

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
7	5	5	6	3	2	2	1	1	6

Initiative	9 + 2D6
Movement	x2/x3/+2 (x2/x5/+2 Flight)
Condition Monitor	12/10
Limits	Physical 8, Mental 4, Social 4
Armor	6
Skills	Flight 4, Gymnastics 5, Perception 5, Sneaking 5, Tracking 5, Unarmed Combat 7
Powers	Armor (6), Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision), Natural Weapon (Bite/Claws: DV 8P, AP –2), Venom (Vector: Injection, Speed: 1 Combat Turn, Penetration: –2, Power: 9, Effect: Disorientation, Physical Damage, Nausea)
Weaknesses	Allergy (Pollution, Mild)
Note	+1 Reach

MEISTERSINGER

(MEGAPTERA PALESTRINA)

Terrain: Oceans and seas
Diet: Carnivore (filter feeder)
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: (Sapient)
Length/Height: 26.4 m
Mass: 55,000 kg

These magnificent creatures are truly a marvel of the Awakened era. Though Awakened from the humpback whale, the meistersinger often matches the blue whale in size and stature. They are a gentle giant of the seas—up until they feel their environment is being wronged.

A few years back, JackPoint got a letter that revealed some of the inner workings of the Sea Dragon. This letter prompted me to take a deeper interest in marine biology, which led me to a close study of the meistersinger. They are sapient creatures, and those with the talent can connect and communicate with them if the meistersinger allows. The communication is confusing, and it took me weeks to begin deciphering what they were saying with any accuracy. Complex messages were even harder to decipher, and while metahumans have long learned to talk down to those not as intelligent as they are, the meistersingers have not developed that trait. They communicate with metahumans just as if they were communicating with another of their kind and care nothing for the lingual and conceptual barriers between the species.

My "interviews" with the twenty-six meistersingers that were willing to "speak" to me gave me an insight into the behaviors that have made them both feared and revered by men of the sea. Meistersingers consider themselves the guardians of all the sea. They portray themselves as protectors of both its great wealth of resources and its delicate natural balance. When they attack a ship, it is because that ship is either damaging the natural balance, taking the resources of the oceans, or both. Commercial fishing vessels are frequent targets as they pull massive numbers of fish (a resource in the mind of the meistersingers) and shift the ecological balance of that area's ecosystem. When they choose to save those they have wrecked, it is simply a matter of balancing the scales and preventing unnecessary loss of life. The boat was the threat, not the sailors.

Their efforts are not without opponents, both above and below the sea. Numerous megacorporations, in particular major aquatic players like Maersk and Proteus, target the meistersingers because they cause so many problems and cost them millions of nuyen. Below the deep blue, the meistersingers are constantly dealing with the machinations of the Sea Dragon as she works to control the waters of the world.

We don't see it, but there is a war going on beneath the waves. We are sometimes pulled into that war by the Sea Dragon, which often puts us at odds with the meistersingers. That is not a good place to be when we are talking about beings that can command other aquatic mammals and fish, have the paranatural ability to engage our terror response, can crack the hull of a freighter with a ramming or breach attack, have the ability to push thoughts into our minds, and make actual focused attacks with sound, which does a lot of damage under water.

They were amazing to research, but I am certainly glad I always stayed on their good side.

- I can't say the same. I can add that they have the ability to attack in packs, or pods, whatever you want to call it. When they do, they can combine low-level sonic resonance to rattle a ship to pieces or completely incapacitate the crew. They can also create massive waves to roll most any ship. I'm not sure if that ability is a combined thing or what, but

it happened to one of my trawlers that was dropping off some cargo.

- Kane

- You mean dumping waste.
- Ecotope

- Tomato, tomAHto.
- Kane

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
2X	5	4	3X	5	3	4	5	3	6	6

Initiative	8 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Condition Monitor	28/12
Limits	Physical 28, Mental 7, Social 8
Armor	20
Skills	Exotic Ranged Weapon: Sonic Projection 6, Perception 7, Swimming 6, Unarmed Combat 4
Powers	Animal Control (Fish, Aquatic Mammals), Armor (20), Compulsion, Engulf (Water), Enhanced Senses (Sonar), Fear, Immunity (Normal Weapons), Influence, Magic Sense, Mind Link, Natural Weapon (Breach: DV 30P, AP +4), Sapience, Search, Sonic Projection, Toughness (10)
Weaknesses	Uneducated

MERROW

(MERHOMO MARINA)

Terrain: Coastal waters
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: (Sapient)
Length/Height: 3.0m
Mass: 500 kg

The merrow I studied were another offshoot of my interest in the activities of the Sea Dragon, though with far less friendly results than the meistersingers. Merrow are a rather clannish and unpleasant lot, especially when they are in the employ of another being, such as the Sea Dragon. Those I socialized with would not admit the queen of the sea was their benefactor, but they had remarkably nice weapons for a race that normally uses rather primitive designs.

They displayed the typical variety one would expect of a sapient species. They had artisans, warriors, and laymen (or laymerrow), some of whom were Awakened. Though they breathe air, they have a remarkable dive time between surfacings, often augmented by spells to allow water breathing and/or a vast collection of underwater air caches that the merrow set up around their territory. They are highly territorial, and all three of the tribes I interacted with wouldn't allow me to travel unescorted. They also all refused to answer any questions about the Sea Dragon. While I normally hate speculation, I feel this mutual coincidence is too much.

Not all tribes of merrow are under the thumb of the Sea Dragon, and some have developed trade relations with local populations on rural islands. Rarely do they interact with metahumans within large coastal cities, with the exception of chasing them away from their preferred hunting grounds.

- Merrow are a mixed bag for those of us who live our lives at sea. Some sailors trade with them and work well together, but some tribes of merrow would rather see every ship on the water sank to the bottom. Talk if you get the option, but keep that gyrojet in reach.
- Kane

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
5	3	5	5	3	3	3	3	3	6	3

Initiative	10 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x6/+3 (Swimming)
Condition Monitors	11/10
Limits	Physical 7, Mental 4, Social 5
Armor	2
Skills	Assensing 4, Gymnastics 4, Perception 3, Swimming 7, Unarmed Combat 3
Powers	Armor 2, Dual Natured, Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision), Sapience
Weaknesses	Uneducated
Notes	As a sapient species, merrow also have Awakened among them

NAGA

(CUSTOS SERPENS)

Terrain: Jungle
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: (Sapient)
Length/Height: 10.0 m
Mass: 300 kg

Originally naga were thought to be an intelligent, trainable, and Awakened ten-meter-long snake species. Various security companies caught naga and trained them to work as guard animals. Little did these companies know, the naga were listening and learning about metahuman society from their handlers and others they came into contact with. These interactions— including those in southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent, where the naga were often revered and worshipped in local tradition— allowed naga to gain an understanding of the new powers in the world around them. All they had to do was endure tedious, occasionally dangerous jobs.

When naga in the security firms were retired due to age or escape, many of these gathered with other naga in Asia. Meanwhile, Cambodian naga were gathering around the ruins of Angkor Wat. Tourist travel decreased with fear of the local paracritters, which were servants of the naga, and the naga were left to create a home. Barely over a decade old now, the Naga Kingdom of An-

gkor Wat was formed by naga and a coalition of sapient paranormal beings. Since that time, the naga of the world have revealed more about their nature, including their ability to speak metahuman languages with only a slight speech impediment involving hard consonants. Many naga have begun using their nation's riches to attend universities, mostly in the region around Angkor Wat due to climate restriction of their cold-blooded physiology. Naga of differing origins often resemble the predominant snake species of the area. In Angkor Wat, the various python, viper, and krait species are strongly represented, with some of the lesser species present as well. In Amazonia the anaconda is king, and naga of this variant are often bulkier than their kin.

- Borrow much?
- Slamm-0!

- Actually, you borrowed this from someone who had borrowed it from me. Oh, the tangled web we weave.
- G-Nome

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
5	3	4	6	4	3	4	3	4	6	4

Initiative	8 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x3/+2
Condition Monitors	11/10
Limits	Physical 7, Mental 5, Social 6
Armor	8
Skills	Assensing 4, Gymnastics 3, Perception 7, Unarmed Combat 4
Qualities	Cold-Blooded (p. 120, Run Faster)
Powers	Armor 8, Dual Natured, Guard, Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+1)P, AP –2, –1 Reach), Sapience, Venom (Vector: Injection, Speed: Instant, Penetration: -, Power: 8, Effect: Physical Damage)
Weaknesses	Uneducated
Notes	As a sapient species naga also have Awakened among them

NOVA SCORPION

(SCORPIONIDA NOVALIS)

Terrain: Deserts
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Nocturnal
Aggro Index: 3.2
Length/Height: 1.1 m (0.25 m tail)
Mass: 30 kg

While I still tell students the classic line, "the bigger, the better, when it comes to scorpions," I quickly remind them of the nova scorpion and that phrases coined last century don't count with parabiological species. I usually go into a short lecture on the Indian red scorpion that is often crushed under hand accidentally while climbing and ignored because it's so cute and small. Then you start vomiting. This type of scorpion is the common progenitor of the nova scorpion in deserts around the globe, giving the nova scorpion its distinctive golden carapace.

At over a meter long, the nova scorpion is a terrifying arachnid, but it is remarkably timid. The only species it actively attacks is the gamma spider, a resource competitor. Most other threats result in retreat into their burrows. Fools often follow them there and find out the hard, painful, and deadly way that nova scorpions are social. Small groups of two to ten specimens often share the same burrows. The sting of a single nova scorpion will kill an average ork; the sting of several will drop a troll with every piece of filtering ware on the market.

As arachnids they aren't trainable, but they can be manipulated easily and used as simple security in locations not frequented by metahuman employees. More often they are found in corporate processing facilities where their venom is milked.

- Live capture of these beasties is quite a common job, and not just for the venom milking. Fight rings around the world use nova scorpions. They look terrifying and push up the odds during a few matches with unskilled fighters, but they lose most matches against someone who knows the tail is the only threat.
- Stone

- Get clipped by one of those claws and then come back and say that last line again.
- Chainmaker

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
4	4	4	3	3	3	5	1	2	6	3

Initiative	9 + 2D6
Movement	x1/x2/+1
Condition Monitor	10/10
Limits	Physical 5, Mental 4, Social 4
Armor	6
Skills	Perception 5, Sneaking 6, Unarmed Combat 4
Powers	Armor (6), Concealment (Self), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV 6P, AP –4; Sting: DV 2P, AP –1), Venom (Vector: Injection, Speed: 1 hour, Penetration: –2, Power: 12, Effect: Nausea, Physical Damage)

OZIAN BABOON

(PAPIO AEROBAUM)

Terrain: Jungle/Plains
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 6.2–8.9
Length/Height: 1.1m
Mass: 20.3 kg

Awakened from the Chacma baboon of southern Africa, the Ozian baboon gets its name from the famed flying monkeys of L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* novel. These ones aren't naturally as nasty as those

the wicked witch used, but they are trainable for enhanced aggression. Densely muscled but light-boned, they primarily kill their prey by lifting them into the air and dropping them. Heavy prey up to the size of an oryx can be lifted by groups of Ozian baboons working in tandem. Heavier prey lifts are rumored and highly probable, as male Ozian baboons have been found capable of several arcane talents.

- Oryx are not the limit. I've seen a flight of Ozians hoist a full grown elephant. There was some form of manipulation spell on the elephant. I wasn't able to gather more detail, as they lifted it out of range quickly. When it returned to assensing range, the spell was dropped, and I couldn't read any residual signature over the elephants' terrified aura.
- Lyran

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
4	5	4	4	2	2	5	4	2	6	4

Initiative	9 + 2D6
Movement	x1/x3/+1 (x2/x4/+2 Flight)
Condition Monitor	9/9
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 4, Social 6
Armor	2
Skills	Gymnastics 5, Flight 8, Intimidation 6, Perception 6, Sneaking 3, Spellcasting 4, Tracking 4, Unarmed Combat 4
Powers	Armor (2), Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision, Smell), Innate Spell (Levitate), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV 6P, AP –2)
Weaknesses	Fragile (2)

PHOENICIAN BIRDS

(PHOENIX VAR.)

Terrain: Jungle/Forest/Plains/Urban
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 6.5+
Length/Height: varies by species (0.19–1.4 m)
Mass: varies by species (0.045–5.3 kg)

Recent research has shown the common phoenix (*Phoenix aureus*) is not the only species of firebird. A wide variety of avian species underwent parallel SURGE expressions. While the original phoenix Awakened from species in Eastern Asia and North Africa, SURGE variants of the cardinal (North America: red flames), macaw (Central/South America: multi-hued flames), bird of paradise (Asia: white flames), secretary bird (Southern Africa: black and red flames), and the European roller (Europe: blue flames) have all appeared since 2062. While the basic species had an Aggro Index of only 4.2, the SURGED phoenixes appear far more aggressive and often use their flames to ignite flammables in order to herd their prey or even burn them alive.

Since it does not have an ample supply of dry grass to burn in the jungles of Central/South America, the phoenician macaw has an oily secretion that it releases from its wings that burns even in the humid jungle. This has been especially troublesome in the favelas of South American cities, where the phoenician macaws will burn crowded complexes and then feed on the cooked bodies inside.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
3	5	4	4	2	2	4	1	4	6	5

Initiative	8 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x2/+1 (x3/x6/+2 Flight)
Condition Monitor	8/9
Limits	Physical 5, Mental 4, Social 4
Armor	—
Skills	Flight 5, Perception 4, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Elemental Attack (Fire), Energy Aura (Fire), Engulf (Fire), Enhanced Senses (Vision Enhancement), Immunity (Fire), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV 5P, AP –2)
Weaknesses	Fragile (2); Phoenician Macaw adds Secretion (flammable oils)

PEGASUS

(EQUUS VOLATILIS AMPLUS)

Terrain: Grasslands
Diet: Herbivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 2.8
Length/Height: 1.8 m (8 m wingspan)
Mass: 350 kg

The classic winged horse of mythology was only a short study for me right after my time studying the unicorns. It was supposed to be longer, but I took the extra time looking into the horned horse and didn't get near the time I wanted with the winged one. I managed to learn that they tend to be more solitary than the unicorn and thus were much harder for me to track and compare. They showed no interest in interactions with mundane horses, unicorns, or any other equine variation that they encountered.

I was able to tag a few specimens and track them over an extended period. The data revealed a location where several of the pegasi I was studying frequented. Closer inspection found it to be a gathering and breeding ground for them, located up in the hills of northern Greece. Due to the brisk trade in black-market pegasi I won't be more detailed, but I will say it went a long way to show they are far more social than is usually let on.

- Grabbing one of these things isn't the issue. Keeping them around until the delivery is. A pegasus will attack anyone that appears to be threatening its home. This defense can come in the form of wing buffets that can knock a troll from their feet and a gravity-powered diving attack with their hooves.
- Sticks

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
3	5	6	7	3	2	4	2	2	6	4

Initiative	10 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x4/+6 (x2/x4/+2 Flight)
Condition Monitor	10/10
Limits	Physical 10, Mental 4, Social 5
Armor	4
Skills	Flight 6, Perception 5, Running 5, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Armor (4), Natural Weapon (Wing Buffet: DV 7S, AP –2, Knockdown (4)), Natural Weapon (Kick: DV 10S, AP –)
Weaknesses	Dietary Requirement (Fruit), Fragile (2)
Note	+1 Reach

PERYTON

(CERVOS INSOLENS)

Terrain: Forest/Grassland
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 6.7
Length/Height: 1.5 m (5.5 m wingspan)
Mass: 150 kg

My research, fueled by my own curiosity in most cases, sometimes follows a winding path, but often the logical progression can be seen, especially when you follow a winged *equus* with a winged *cervidae*. The peryton is interesting in its difference from mundane deer. While both unicorns and pegasi continue to eat like horses, the peryton has expanded its diet beyond the diet of a regular deer. Though not strictly a carnivore, the peryton adds meat to the menu as often as they can. Combining their preternatural ability to cause folks harm with their ability to fly, they are able to get prey into precarious positions where they can attack with their antlers or sharp, powerful hooves. Unless the prey simply makes a wrong turn and ends up at the bottom of a ravine, making the hunt easier.

- Deer-hunting season combined with duck-hunting season all in one!
- Slamm-0!

- In areas where local deer populations and peryton share territory, the peryton are beginning to outnumber populations of standard local deer. They have a wider source of food, narrower scope of predators, and greater method of escape. The only things likely keeping them in check are humans looking for their bones and antlers for use as arcane trappings or reagents.
- Lyran

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
4	5	5	7	4	2	4	2	1	6	4

Initiative	9 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x4/+5 (x2/x4/+2 Flight)
Condition Monitor	10/10
Limits	Physical 9, Mental 4, Social 5
Armor	4
Skills	Flight 5, Perception 8, Running 5, Unarmed Combat 6
Powers	Accident, Armor (4), Enhanced Senses (Vision Magnification), Natural Weapon (Antlers: DV 8P, AP –2), Natural Weapon (Kick: DV 10S, AP –), Silence
Weaknesses	Fragile (2)
Note	+1 Reach

PIASMA

(URSUS PIASMA)

Terrain: Forest
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 9.3 (10.0 during mating season)
Length/Height: 2.98 m
Mass: 395 kg

As brown bear is to human, piasma is to ork, with the added bonus of dermal deposits. The piasma is a massive Awakened brown bear (*ursus arctos*), and captive breeding and testing have revealed the piasma as a variant expression, rather than separate species, legitimizing the metahuman comparison. In the wild, piasma are extremely territorial and hyper-aggressive against anything they find in their domain. This is not limited to living creatures, as shown in the Ersenberg study of 2069, where vehicles and tents left in the territory of a piasma were demolished once found. Size is also not a limiting factor, as piasma have been known to attack transport rigs crossing highways in their territory.

- Most of the NAN nations have bounties on piasma, but very few are ever collected. These beasts are a slitch to bring down, and they play dirty. Not to mention the rumors of piasma with some additional paranormal abilities. I ignore the stuff about breathing fire, but paralyzing with a growl seems right up their alley.
- Mika

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
12	5	3	12	4	2	4	1	2	6

Initiative	9 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x3/+2
Condition Monitor	17/10
Limits	Physical 14, Mental 4, Social 4
Armor	12
Skills	Intimidation 8, Perception 4, Sneaking 4, Tracking 5, Unarmed Combat 7
Powers	Armor (12), Enhanced Senses (Thermographic Vision, Wide-Band Hearing), Natural Weapon (Claws/Bite: DV 12P, AP –2), Toughness (3)
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Mild)
Note	+1 Reach, Optional Powers (Fear, Paralyzing Howl)

ROC, LESSER

(DIAMEDIA ROC)

Terrain: Coastal Regions
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Diurnal (Nocturnal hunter)
Aggro Index: 2.6/7.8
Length/Height: 2.0 m (6.0 m wingspan)
Mass: 34.6 kg

My research into the lesser roc started during a regular

run. We were operating along the coast of a place I won't name, and our rigger kept losing his drones. We ran back footage and caught a glimpse of feathers a few times, so I switched up part of my work and started monitoring his drones. Caught my first good look at these giant seagulls when I thought they were a solid klick off only to realize they were a lot bigger than I expected.

After that first time I spent a few extra months along the coast and watched these things wreak havoc on drones that flew either too close to their nesting grounds or just passed through their hunting grounds while they were out on the prowl. The lesser roc doesn't have the webbed feet like its progenitor, the albatross, as the roc spends its time gliding high in the sky and attacking as a bird of prey rather than landing in the water or diving below the surface while hunting.

- I've lost hundreds of drones to these things over the years, and I've tried to work out ways to keep them protected. These things glide so high up you don't scan them on radar and they've got low enough detection sigs and come in so fast when they dive bomb, meaning you don't have a chance to pick them up before … BOOM!
- Kane

- These are even a problem over coastal cities, and not just over rural rocky coasts. They glide perpetually on the thermocline created by the city's heat and dive down on anything that flies up near them.
- Sounder

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
4	5	4	4	2	2	4	1	1	6	3

Initiative	8 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x2/+1 (x2/x5/+2 Flight)
Condition Monitor	8/9
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 4, Social 4
Armor	—
Skills	Flight 7, Perception 5, Unarmed Combat 6
Powers	Dive Attack, Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision, Vision Magnification), Immunity (Pathogens, Toxins), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV 4P, AP –2),
Weaknesses	Fragile (2)

SHADOWHOUND

(CANIS UMBRAE)

Terrain: Forest/Urban
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Nocturnal
Aggro Index: 7.7
Length/Height: 1.2 m
Mass: 60 kg

Expansion into desolate urban areas has drawn a large volume of attention to shadowhound research, mostly in the areas of physiology and social culture. Normally native to woodland areas where they prey on deer, rabbits, and other mundane creatures, shadowhounds have expanded into urban areas and extended their meal selections to include dogs, cats, rats, and other city species, including metahumans. Attacks occur frequently, though the spots shadowhounds have been moving into are filled with the people society has cast off, and attacks on them are not reported.

The shadowhound closely resembles a mix of several large dog species, though its fur is a mottled mix of shifting black and grey that is a result of an undercoat that creates their ability to hide in shadowy environments. They socialize like wolves, with a single male alpha leading a pack and holding breeding rights over the pack's females. Pups are protected closely until males mature and get pushed out to form their own packs.

Shadowhounds are sensitive to sunlight and create dens that are completely protected, where they spend the daylight hours resting and socializing. Several members of the pack rotate the responsibility of staying awake through the evening to protect the pack and pups from threats.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
4	4	4	5	3	2	4	1	1	6	4

Initiative	8 + 2D6
Movement	x2/x6/+3
Condition Monitor	10/10
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 4, Social 4
Armor	2
Skills	Perception 5, Sneaking 7, Tracking 5, Unarmed Combat 6
Powers	Armor (2), Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV 7P, AP –), Shadow Cloak, Silence
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Severe)

SNOW SNAKE

(OPHIDIA NIPHOPHILIA)

Terrain: Forest/Tundra/Urban
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 3.4
Length/Height: 2.5 m
Mass: 16.4 kg

My interest here started as pure curiosity at the oddity of a snake with fur, but it quickly grew into a true sense of astonishment at this unique creature. They're far larger than I originally thought they would be, and their ability to move through snow seemed to be an innate ability granted by their Awakened nature. Extensive study, however, revealed their ability was related more to their bite than to any kind of magic. Their venom contains not only a powerful toxin but also a chemical compound remarkably similar to a concentrated antifreeze that quickly melts ice and snow but dilutes to the point

of non-potency quickly. It also provides exceptional durability to their burrows.

In warmer climates, snow snakes spend the warmer months in estivation. This includes urban areas, where they have been known to burrow beneath trees in parks or within landscaping around buildings. They have become quite prolific inside the former CZ of Chicago. Specimens here came south during the several years of harsh winters between '65 and '71. These years saw the snow snake expand its range as far south as St. Louis before extensive hunting pushed it back north.

While quite frightening in appearance, with stark white and tiny red eyes, the snow snake is non-aggressive. If you get attacked by a snow snake, you have either accidentally stepped on one and it feels trapped, or you're a hoophead who's trying to handle one and don't know how to handle vipers

- They're extremely smart and actually trainable.
- Ecotope

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
2	1	5	2	2	1	4	1	1	6	3

Initiative	9 + 3D6
Movement	x1/x2/+1
Condition Monitor	9/9
Limits	Physical 4, Mental 3, Social 4
Armor	
Skills	Perception 4, Sneaking 5, Tracking 4, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision, Smell, Thermographic Vision), Immunity (Cold), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV 3P, AP +1), Venom (Vector: Injection, Speed: 1 minute, Penetration: –1, Power: 8, Effect: Disorientation, Nausea, Physical Damage)
Weaknesses	Vulnerability (Fire)

SPIDER BEAST

(NEPHILA GIGANTUS)

Terrain: Jungle/Forest
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 4.3
Length/Height: 0.52 m
Mass: 1.2 kg

First thing to know about these things is that the half-meter figure I include for length is just their body—their legs easily match that length, giving the spider beast a solid meter and a half of total length. While they're large and scary-looking with their eight big, black eyes, fur-covered body, three-centimeter-long fangs, and long legs that end in razor-sharp hooks, they're remarkably non-aggressive. The spider beast is a web hunter, after all. They don't stalk prey; they lay a trap and then strike once their food is caught. Their hooked legs make them excellent climbers, and they spin their webs across trees, alleys, doorways, and cave rocks. They especially like putting webs in places where they are hard to see.

The webbing of a spider beast is strong and can easily entangle small creatures and even metahumans. Because they often snag larger prey, the spider beast makes the most of their prey's sudden panic and confusion after encountering a web. They're lightning fast and pounce quickly on anything animate that touches their web. Sticks, leaves, and even small explosives won't draw them to attack, though a small explosive attached to a wind-up MechaTroll doll will do the trick.

While they carry enough venom to kill small or weak prey, most larger prey can survive the initial bite. What they can't withstand is the mild paralytic that slows them enough for the spider beast to start binding them up in webbing.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
2	4	4	3	3	1	3	1	1	6	6

Initiative	7 + 3D6
Movement	x1/x3/+1
Condition Monitor	9/10
Limits	Physical 4, Mental 3, Social 4
Armor	4
Skills	Gymnastics 4, Perception 3, Sneaking 6, Unarmed Combat 3
Powers	Armor (4), Enhanced Senses (Tactile), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV 3P, AP –), Substance Extrusion (Spider Silk), Venom (Vector: Injection, Speed: Instant, Penetration: –4, Power: 6, Effect: Disorientation, Physical Damage, Nausea, Paralysis), Wall Walking

THUNDERBIRD, GREATER

(AVESFULMEN SPLENDIDUS)

Terrain: Mountains
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 6.8
Length/Height: 3.2 m (10.2 m wingspan)
Mass: 100 kg

There is a certain entertainment and challenge that comes with researching an avian species. This is especially true of something like the greater thunderbird. This species only comes to lower altitudes when picking up its next meal, usually to bring it back up and then drop it to its death. It took a lot of creativity—and no small amount of nuyen—to keep myself in the air and mobile enough to both watch and avoid being a meal for these giant golden eagles.

The greater thunderbird is usually a solo hunter, but during mating and some other times, flocks of these critters will come together. These flocks are devastating hunters, as they combine their paranatural capabilities when they attack and can bring down large, even well-shielded, aircraft. A single greater thunderbird can

use its electrical projection to cause an avalanche and bring down ice and rock onto an entire herd of prey. A flock of them can make repeated strikes and actually change the face of a mountain.

Greater thunderbirds are scavengers and hunters, attacking prey as large as bears with little fear. They tend to stun their prey first with an electrical attack or two before going in for the kill, which usually involves a quick elevation to fifty meters or so and then an even more rapid drop to the ground. Lift, drop, repeat if necessary. In the open sky, the process involves a quick stunning electrical strike in flight followed by snagging them as they fall and a few rending bites. The remains are then either dropped at the nest for any fledglings the adult may be caring for or dropped off at their coffers. The coffers for the greater thunderbirds are locations at high altitudes where they leave extra food. The cold preserves the meat for use when times are lean or the greater thunderbird is too busy rearing young to hunt. Coffers with an excess of one thousand kilos of meat have been discovered.

Adult greater thunderbirds possess the ability to not only create their own electrical projection but also manipulate local meteorology in order to gather charged clouds that create violent electrical storms. This ability is rarely used in any offensive manner, but rather as a defensive shield when the greater thunderbird wishes to evade pursuit.

- Flocks of greater thunderbirds in the Rockies will use this weather controlling ability to herd and scare cattle into position for an avalanche attack. Rumors in the mountains also tell about these things surrounding a town with storms to keep the people in while picking the surrounding area clean of prey.
- Stone

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
4	3	7	8	3	2	4	1	1	6	1

Initiative	11 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x2/+1 (x2/x4/+1 Flight)
Condition Monitor	9/10
Limits	Physical 9, Mental 4, Social 4
Armor	—
Skills	Astral Combat 5, Exotic Ranged Weapon: Lightning 5, Flight 5, Perception 6, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Dual Natured, Elemental Attack (Electricity), Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV 10P, AP –4), Weather Control (Electrical Storms)
Weaknesses	Fragile (1)

TROGLODYTE

(PAN SPELUNCAE)

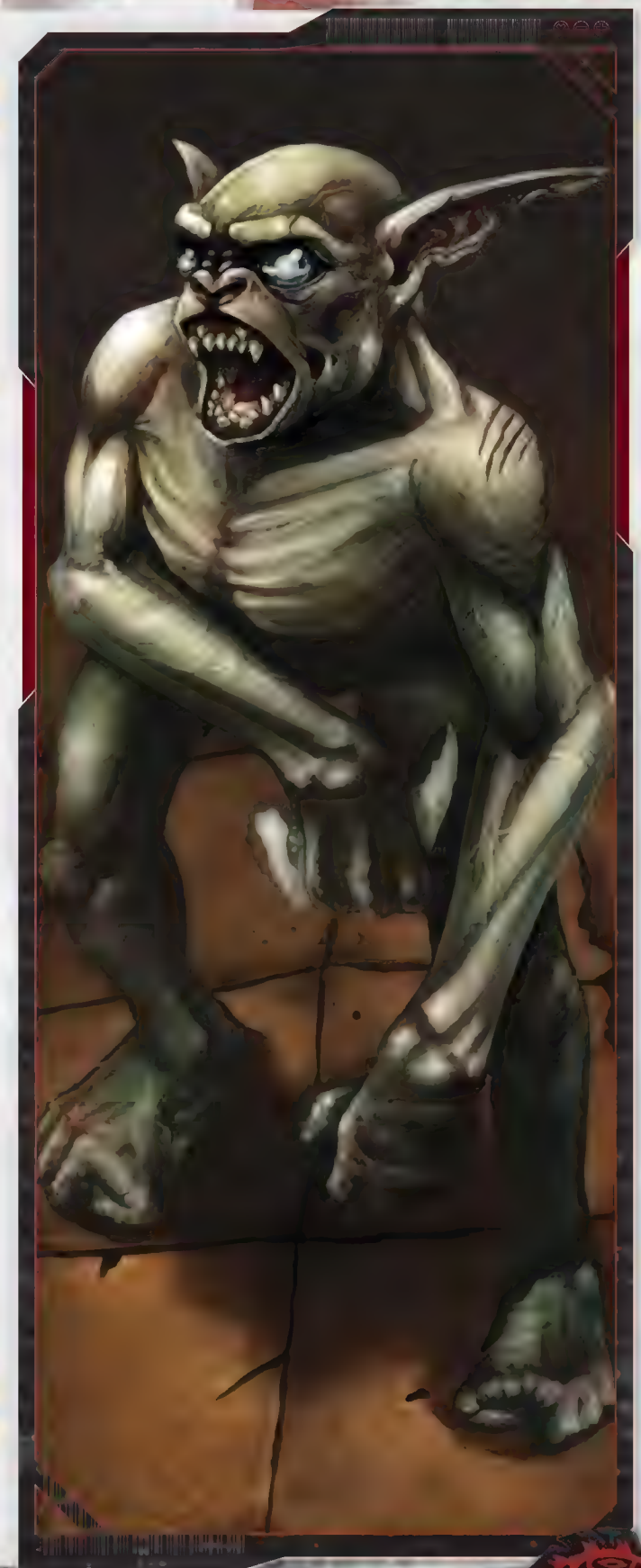
Terrain: Underground
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 0.2
Length/Height: 1.6 m
Mass: 45 kg

I am one of the rare few in the parabiologist community to have spent an extended period of time living among the troglodytes of Turret, a former mining town with an extensive series of abandoned mines. The culture I found among them was remarkable, and the incorporation of aspects of the former mine into their daily lives was astonishingly sophisticated. The Turret tribe was quite different from several other tribes I had briefly observed and differed from documentation provided on various tribes by other researchers. Each tribe differs in hierarchical structure based on the culture they have developed. The Turrets favor creativity, and the most intelligent among them lead the tribe. Intelligence is usually gauged by their use of the technology left over from the mine's operational days. While that may not seem sophisticated by modern standings, these are Awakened chimpanzees we are talking about, so even the seemingly simple devices of the 1800s are complex to them. In the same region, there are also tribes governed by the strongest, the eldest, and a few fledgling tribes that are quite chaotic and haven't developed a system yet.

Even the most sophisticated are still highly skeptical of outsiders, both their own kind and metahumans. They remain a reclusive subterranean race that only ventures to the surface on moonless nights to gather food during the summer months. Members of the species vary greatly in their sensitivity to sunlight, with many unable to handle even the light reflected from the moon.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
3	3	4	2	3	2	3	2	1	6	2

Initiative	7 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x4/+1
Condition Monitor	10/10
Limits	Physical 4, Mental 4, Social 5
Armor	—
Skills	Clubs 3, Gymnastics 3, Sneaking 3, Throwing Weapons 4, Unarmed Combat 3
Powers	Concealment, Enhanced Senses (Thermographic Vision), Sapience
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Moderate), Uneducated



UNICORN

(UNICORNUS VALIDUS)

Terrain: Grasslands/Forest
Diet: Herbivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 1.2
Length/Height: 1.52 m
Mass: 450 kg

I was surprised to find myself celebrating an anniversary of the start of my study on the unicorns of the North American plains when the trip was originally planned for only a month. The animals were fascinating and their dynamic relationship with mundane wild horses was a sight to behold. Though as amazing as that was, the first thing that caught my interest was the unicorn with the piebald coat rather than the stark white of legend. I had read in others' research that such things existed but had never witnessed it in person. Something about the contrast struck me, and I spent several additional months studying the various herds of wild horses throughout the central plains of North America that counted unicorns among their number.

The unicorns were not always the leaders of the herd, but they were always revered. The unicorns acted no different, and they interbred and interacted with the other horses regularly. When herds with unicorns encountered each other, there was no sign of conflict, though the unicorns appeared to keep their distance from each other.

- Though unicorns are usually depicted as the defenders of their kind, the opposite has been true many times over in my experience. The wild horses that are part of herds containing unicorns will often defend the unicorn at the cost of their own lives when a threat is present. This is especially true when the threat is directly targeting the unicorn, like a talislegger looking for a horn.
- Sticks

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
7	5	5	8	4	2	4	6	2	6	5

Initiative	9 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x4/+6
Condition Monitor	12/10
Limits	Physical 10, Mental 4, Social 8
Armor	4
Skills	Counterspelling 8, Perception 6, Running 6, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Armor (4), Immunity (Pathogens), Magical Guard, Natural Weapon (Horn: DV 7P, AP –4), Natural Weapon (Kick: DV 10S, AP –)
Weaknesses	Allergy (Pollutants, Severe)
Note	+1 Reach

VOLLEYING PORCUPINES

(HYSTRIX SAGITTARIUS)

Terrain: Forest
Diet: Herbivore
Activity: Nocturnal
Aggro Index: 1.4
Length/Height: 1.1 m
Mass: 14 kg

My study of the volleying porcupine was short and focused solely on their ability to fire their quills after an increasing number of reports that the quills were poisonous. Of the forty-two individuals I studied across the coastal nations of Southern Europe, none had poisonous quills. The group included twelve specimens who regularly rolled their bodies in the fecal matter of other animals, an activity that could easily have caused a reaction similar to a toxin.

Generally, these herbivores are non-aggressive, solitary, and non-territorial. Within my research I discovered a small group of eight specimens, two of which were juveniles, that had taken up residency together near a small villa in southern Italy. They were very protective of their territory and actively sprayed and sent several volleys of spines at my drone while I looked a bit closer. It seems the owner of the villa had set up several salt licks around their property. While I had heard of this technique before, I had never seen the level of aggression and territorial behavior these specimens exhibited. When I brought the drone close enough to the salt lick to get a sample, the porcupines immediately jumped on it. The chem sensors managed to send a report back prior to the drone getting smashed to bits. Whoever is living in that villa has added a little chemical cocktail that makes this salt addictive. Looked like a coca leaf derivative, according to the info.

- Get 'em hooked and keep 'em coming back for more. Plus add in something that makes them a little more irritable when they come down, and you've got a great way to retain some inexpensive security.
- Stone

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
2	4	2	2	3	1	3	1	2	6	4

Initiative	5 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x3/+1
Condition Monitor	9/10
Limits	Physical 3, Mental 3, Social 5
Armor	1
Skills	Gymnastics 5, Perception 5, Sneaking 5, Unarmed Combat 4
Powers	Armor (1), Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision), Natural Ranged Weapon (Quills: DV 3P, AP –2), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV 2P, AP –), Noxious Breath
Weaknesses	Dietary Requirement (Salt)
Note	Quills are barbed, and pulling them out inflicts 3P (unresisted) or requires a Logic + First Aid (4) Test; Dirty Quills add: Venom (Vector: Injection, Speed: 1 hour, Penetration: –2, Effect: Disorientation, Nausea, Stun Damage)

WOLVERINE, GREATER

(GULO IMPII)

Terrain: Forests
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 9.6
Length/Height: 2 m
Mass: 110 kg

Wolverines are well-known for their aggressive tendencies, and the greater wolverine is primarily identified and reclassified based on its increased size, which just means its tendencies extend to larger foes. Specimens have been known to attack other dangerous paranormals, including piasma, without provocation.

Greater wolverines will attack anything they feel is ... well ... anything, really. Nothing decreases their aggressiveness, including existing food, recent meals, injuries, or superior numbers. My personal research has shown that while this creature is hyper-aggressive, it is tactically intelligent and will use a variety of means in order to overcome its opponents' advantages, including stealth, ambush, distractions, and even baiting or trap-setting in the form of small pits or hidden divots in the dirt to hinder movement and possibly break an ankle.

- G-Nome knows his stuff. Most parabiologists report on the GW as being just a psycho killer, but these things are smart. They have been known to gather other mundane wolverines together. While not normally pack animals, the GW keeps the others in line somehow.
- Ecotope

- Thank you for confirming a hypothesis I was developing. I had been chased by a wolverine while observing a greater, and the beast was moving very quickly. Now I realize I was correct in thinking it was multiple wolverines maneuvering around me.
- G-Nome

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
7	6	5	6	4	2	4	1	1	6

Initiative	9 + 2D6
Movement	x2/x5/+2
Condition Monitor	12/10
Limits	Physical 8, Mental 4, Social 4
Armor	6
Skills	Perception 5, Sneaking 4, Tracking 6, Unarmed Combat 8
Powers	Animal Contrl (Woverines, Badgers), Enhanced Senses (Smell), Armor (6), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV 8P, AP —)
Weaknesses	Reduced Senses (Vision)

WHISPERS IN THE BLOOD

POSTED BY: RED

- Whew! Just in time! I almost missed Slamm's deadline.
- Red

- Busy finding virgins to suck dry?
- Clockwork

- Don't worry, you're safe.
- Red

- All right, our favorite probationary member is back again to wax poetic on his favorite topic: himself. If you can parse through the melodrama, maybe he'll have something worth hearing.
- Slamm-0!

- That's just the hangover talking. Red dragged his drunk ass home last night after the game, and was a perfect gentleman about it.
- Netcat

- You sure Slamm-0! wasn't drained? I'll bet you didn't let him in the house near your kid, either ...
- Glitch

- He didn't ask.
- Netcat

I'm going to take a moment to mention something that doesn't get said often enough around here, and it's going to come off as a little whiny and self-righteous. For that, I apologize in advance.

- Can we delete this in advance?
- Glitch

- We give people their shot here, Glitch. Hatchetman. Quietus. Hell, even Puck. We owe 'Jack that much.
- Bull

Slamm-0! asked me to put this together; he was even basically nice about it, though his face *was* stuffed with chips. While I'm always happy to help out, it raised an interesting point for me: Infected metahumans are not treated like people. Not really. At our best, we might be seen almost like celebrities: the immortal club owner in Manhattan, the elven pop star. Untouchable and invulnerable and desirable and unobtainable. At our worst, we are pure boogeymen. We slip you down a rung on the food chain, mindless and hideous. Strong, yes, but

tortured and crippled. Immortality may just mean being locked in a living hell forever. Killing us must seem like a mercy. Maybe it is. And you can collect a nice payday while you're at it.

- You bet your ass I'll collect that payday.
- Clockwork

- Same token: I can collect a bounty on you in fourteen different jurisdictions in the world, just for you being a hobgoblin. Y'know, if I was a myopic ass.
- Red

That's the thing that scares you about us most. It's all in the name: Infected. When we attack, it's not just life or death, but a third, horrifying option: We make *you* into *us*. Even death holds the primal dread of consumption. Nothing is so scary as being food for something, or someone else. Except, maybe, being the one doing the eating.

So I'll ask you to exercise a moment of empathy, if you can. Try to imagine the world through our eyes. Try to understand just how much understanding means. And, understanding, maybe show some compassion to those who are as much victim as predator. One day, you might be one of us, and you'll be at the mercy of someone like you.

- For the record, if it comes to that, I'll appreciate anyone who puts one between my eyes.
- Jimmy No

- Hell, I'll put one in my brain myself.
- Lyran

- You guys talk so much shit about taking your own life before X happens, where X is being captured or going head case or whatever. Not a one of you has ever actually put the gun to your own head. You'd be surprised what you can learn to endure. Push comes to shove, I bet most of you would try to adapt.
- Hannibelle

WHAT ARE WE?

Infected cross the boundary between man and monster more thoroughly than the most cybered samurai or gene-tweaked corp assassin. We're the result of a metahuman who has been put through the metaphysical wringer. Infection is horror and often ecstasy, followed by transformation and rebirth. An old vampire friend of mine once called us "a phoenix of shadow," and I can't argue, even if he tends toward maudlin expression.

- Isn't that a lyric from an old JetBlack track? "Nightsong," I think?
- Kat o' NineTales

- Ugh, this old urban legend?
- Snopes

THE SCIENCE

A glance around the Matrix will give you the hyper-scientific explanation of what the Human-Metahuman Vampiric Virus is. You can learn all about the Harz-Greenbaum serum test, the Krieger Files, the interactions between adaptive viral tissue and cybernetic DNI, and a lot that blurs the lines between scientific examination, magical exploration, and paranoid guesswork. Every answer we get raises more questions, and we don't seem much closer to figuring it out now than we were twenty years ago.

Plain English? HMHVV is a metamagical retrovirus. It exists in a semi-physical, highly Awakened form in hosts, optimizing them into a form that its particular strain finds most useful for hunting and feeding.

THE FIRE

The Infected enjoy a number of advantages over non-Infected. Strain 1 Infected, such as vampires and goblins, are arguably the most efficient and dangerous of all. They have regenerative abilities, which tie into an immunity to disease and poison; they also halt the physical aging process. The virus is greedy and possessive, and it doesn't abide competition from other pathogens or even time. Strength and reflexes are augmented, senses magnified, and new supernatural abilities manifest, such as mist form, increased likelihood for spellcasting or adept ability, natural weapons like fangs or claws, or even the psycho-mystical ability to instill terror in prey. These make the hunt that much easier.

Strain 2 is more random and horrific in its changes. There is far more diversity in their expressions, and their abilities are less given to heightened magical potential. More often, they manifest gross physical mutations, such as the weeping acidic sores of a fomóraig or the hideous claws of a harvester. Among the most dramatic of changes are those undergone by loup-garou, who are covered in a fine coat of dark fur.

Strain 3 is a universal infection—the infamous Krieger strain, resulting in ghouls. As terrifying as this transformation is, it also allows for some semblance of a normal life in the Sixth World. Their needs are less demanding than the previous two types, and they're still able to get surgery to appear metahuman again.

- Easy for the handsome vampire elf to say, Red.
- Hannibelle

- I'm anything but unsympathetic, Belle, you know that. But the fact is, there's a bit less pathos when you just have to eat the dead, and not their souls.
- Red

- Not by much.
- Hannibelle

- How come you've never had surgery to change your looks to something less … ghoulish, anyway?
- Turbo Bunny

- Maybe someday I'll tell you. Hell, maybe someday I'll figure it out myself.
- Hannibelle

THE FUEL

The advantages of certain strains of HMHVV might seem rather tempting. Agelessness and magical power are pretty high up on the list of corporate research Holy Grails. But that power comes at a price. The most obvious is right there in the name. Vampiric means to feed from others of your kind, and HMHVV commands a great cannibal appetite in its victims.

Strain 1 Infected are arguably the worst off. Unable to stomach food, we're forced to drink blood from our victims. This, however, is not the real horror. After all, you can buy blood in bulk from any street doc, and our immunity to disease means we don't care how dirty it is (though it certainly doesn't do any favors for the flavor).

The deeper element isn't the blood itself. We require the vital life force of our victims. Maybe. Maybe it's the intangible connection between body and soul. There isn't enough research to pin it down. But whatever it is, our connection to our bodies, maybe our very souls, is slowly slipping away all the time, and we need to steal pieces of others to keep ours going. And those pieces can't be restored.

- Wasn't there a genetech procedure a few years back that could supposedly restore victims of feeding?
- Hard Exit

- There was. Unfortunately, it ran into two insurmountable roadblocks. The first was a little-known condition called Mana Displacement Syndrome. Basically, it caused a kind of disconnect between the subject's life force and their body, resulting in spontaneous fugue states, a higher likelihood for developing cancer, and a marked vulnerability to magical influences. Cases also showed a higher likelihood for possession; spirits like loa or shedim could somehow slip in the cracks and take over.

  The second was when all the nanites went nuts, leaving the tech unusable and outside further development.
- The Smiling Bandit

Strain 2 has more exotic appetites. Often they need to feed on specific parts of the metahuman body, such as gnawers sucking out bone marrow. Sure, they might be able to hit the body banks and buy or steal what they need, but Strain 2 has a higher incidence than normal of reducing the host to a feral state. Those who retain their intellect are often driven to suicide, become dangerously cunning predators, or must contend with other obstacles imposed by their mutations.

- Such as?
- Glitch

- Fomóraig have to buy clothes with chemical resistance or the sores eat right through them. Loup-garou are literal lunatics, going nuts at a personal point every twenty-eight days, requiring them to lock themselves up or find a black clinic that will install implants to keep their rage in check. Play make-believe with any of the breeds as they're described, and you'll start to understand that everyday life becomes one hell of a challenge.
- Red

Strain 3 has a much broader cannibal hunger. So long as they supplement their diet with metahuman flesh, they can consume any raw animal tissue for sustenance. I've even heard of some including some small degree of seasoning in their cuisine.

- The corpse mushrooms growing in Chicago's Long Pig Farm are a big hit.
- Hannibelle

- An interesting development in Infected research suggests that previous assumptions about Infected dietary requirements may have been false. The Bandersnatch Equation, as it has come to be known, posed the question, "If bandersnatches can breed in the wild and can infect sasquatches to broaden their breeding pool, how could they sustain any population without a constant supply of sasquatches?" In essence, there simply aren't enough sasquatches in the world to support the dietary needs of all the bandersnatches that must be out there.
- The Smiling Bandit

- It calls into question why bandersnatches attack non-sasquatches at all, particularly when they have natural camouflage to keep them hidden. There's plenty of evidence suggesting they're more than capable of consuming the flesh of other sapient species to sustain themselves.
- Doc Fangs

- So what was the result of the Equation?
- Frosty

- That the bandersnatch gains sustenance from many sources but is compelled by reproductive urge to seek and attack sasquatches over other prey.
- The Smiling Bandit

- That doesn't make any sense. Why would you try to kill something when you want it to survive to become like you?
- Baka Dabora

- Because for us, lust and hunger feel very similar.
- Red

- For a creature with a diminished sense of reason, mixing the impulse to feed with the capacity to reproduce ensures several things:

  1. The population doesn't grow too large to be supported; many would-be hosts are eaten, instead.
  2. Only the finest potential hosts change; they were strong or clever enough to survive the attack.
  3. Whether the Infected maintains their sanity or is reduced to a feral state, they will still be compelled to reproduce by instinct.

  Thinking about it, it's a rather elegant way to ensure progressive Darwinian advancement and population control. Horrifying, but elegant.
- The Smiling Bandit

- So, in a nutshell, a sasquatch just tastes better to a bandersnatch?
- 2XL

- Yes, but more than that; it's a psycho-physiological compulsion. I can't believe I'm saying this, but: I can eat elves or trolls, and I'm going to be all right. Humans, though, have a better flavor; I prefer human flesh over, say, an ork. For whatever reason, Infected are adapted to feed on any sapient creature for sustenance, but seek their own kind as often as possible.
- Hannibelle

THE NEW CHANGES

As crazy as it sounds, being Infected used to be easier. A ghoul wouldn't enjoy being in the sun, a vampire even less, but it was only painful. Maybe after an hour you'd burn, and hours of prolonged exposure could be lethal, but the average urban Infected, with shade and a hood and a full belly, could get by just fine. The hunger pains were manageable, the viral instincts more urge than reflex.

Then, something changed.

I was in hibernation when it happened, largely protected, but sometime in the last decade the virus somehow *shifted*, evolving as a gestalt across the world, becoming more severe, more powerful, and most terrifyingly, more flexible.

- How does a virus experience a global change? I can see different strains emerging with exposure to new hosts and environments, but a blanket change to all of the world's Infected? That makes no sense.
- KAM

- Ah, but Red already said it. HMHVV is an *Awakened* virus; there may have been some kind of global shift in the manasphere somehow.
- The Smiling Bandit

- You'd think that would have some kind of observable effect on magic in general, right?
- Lyran

- The metaplanes are a little more complicated than that. Aspects of magic, which are all interconnected, are also four-dimensional. It could be a precursor for future changes for the rest of us. It might also mean that the scales shifted in some way we don't perceive, or aren't yet privy to.
- Ethernaut

- You're all forgetting a third option: The virus may have a gestalt consciousness.
- Plan 9

- That's insane. There is no evidence whatsoever to indicate any intelligence at all, let alone a hive mind of some kind.
- Snopes

- There's precious little concrete research about the Infected at all. They still can't explain mist form, for example. Rather foolish to rule theories out just because of a lack of evidence.
- Plan 10

- Says the invasive AI about the plaguebearers.
- Clockwork

- Pay no attention to him, dear.
- Plan 9

Allergens have become far more potent. You actually *can* kill a vampire with prolonged sunlight exposure now, and we cannot regenerate the damage naturally. Some of us can't regenerate from other allergen exposures, either.

Appetites have become much more focused, the physical and especially psychological need for sustenance turning what was once a relatively reasonable impulse into a sharp, gnawing need. Some

of us older ones had the advantage of scaling up, acclimating to the escalation in hunger. I wouldn't be surprised if newer vampires lack the discipline to hold back from rampant feeding to stop the ache. For them, there was no time to adapt, just a sudden, horrible need that erased everything else.

And that leads to the instincts. There was a time when we acted as our needs demanded, not that different from any other metahuman who has a requirement to meet. If you were hungry, you fed. If you starved, you held off as long as you could, but anyone would take drastic action to stave off starvation. These days, many have to contend with compulsions that can overtake our rational minds, a kind of viral-induced insanity that hijacks our actions. While most of us have no memories of what happens during these breaks, I've gathered sporadic reports that some are conscious of every moment, cognizant but unable to stop themselves from hurting people. Can you imagine that? Trapped in your own body while something forces your actions against your will?

- When did all of this start?
- Butch

- Sometime between '73 and '74. It didn't hit all of us at once.
- Hannibelle

- I can confirm. Where I was, it hadn't affected me. Once I came back into the world, it still didn't take hold until about a year later. It was gradual, but I could feel it happening.
- Red

- Have you had any of these "breaks" yourself?
- Sunshine

- Once. Thankfully, no one got hurt.
- Hannibelle

- No, not as of yet. But I've felt ... *something* pressing against my will in times of extreme hunger or stress. Being a mage means training your willpower, and that's the only thing that kept me in control when the thing inside wanted out.
- Red

One universal quality is that all Infected have become dual-natured. You might think this is an advantage, and in some cases it is, but in my experience it's more of a handicap. Wards get tripped, we show up easier in the astral, etc. I remember there were a few ghoul otaku back in the '60s, but the change seems to have made it impossible for them to express as virtuakinetics.

- You're no decker, Red. Otaku and technomancers are hardly the same thing.
- Glitch

- It's an easy mistake to make for people who remember otaku. Truth be told, we still don't know if there is an evolutionary link between us.
- Netcat

- We're not likely to find out, either. No new otaku have been found since Crash 2.0, and the old ones have probably all faded with age.
- Glitch

The other effect is that Infected have begun to show more variety in their abilities and weaknesses. Once upon a time, a vampire was a vampire, a ghoul was a ghoul, and whatever form your infection took, it was done after the transformation and wouldn't change any further. Now, there're examples of Infected showing variety in the potency of both their powers and vulnerabilities. A vampire, for example, may not have the ability to shift into mist form or regenerate, but might also have more resistance to sunlight or lack a vulnerability to wood. They might even display novel powers of their own, though you don't see many abilities cross over between types. A vampire might have a form of mind control, but isn't likely to express dermal plating like a dzoo-noo-qua or sonic manipulation like a banshee.

- Which means hunting Infected takes more time to observe and a lot more preparation. How about a rundown of your own abilities, Red? For purely educational purposes.
- Sticks

- You didn't get enough observation at that Vory slave auction? Next time I see you around one of those, I'll treat you like any other flesh-peddler.
- Red

- I've got a clip of wood pulp just for you, slim.
- Sticks

- I really have no idea who to root for here.
- Glitch

- I, on the other hand, am taking bets!
- Kane

THE BEASTS IN QUESTION

As part of my re-education when I came back to the world, I started working on this primer on the virus and its multitude of progeny. Then life got in the way and I set it aside. When I got the call from Slamm-0! about this compilation, I dug the file out and cleaned it up a little. I hope it helps.

STRAIN 1, HARZ-GREENBAUM STRAIN

(GHILANI VRYKOLAKIVIRIDAE)

HMHVV in its basic form. It takes a reasonable amount of effort to pass this on, so its victims are fairly rare, especially compared to Strain 2 or Strain 3.

Something I've noticed recently: When we Strain 1 victims use our powers, or we're feeding, our eyes tend to glow with magical energy. This is something relatively new, near as I can tell.

- New to me as well. Interesting.
- Doc Fangs

BANSHEE

The elven expression of Strain 1, banshees retain their sanity, though the virus instills a desire to inspire fear in prey, which usually manifests as an aggressive, hostile personality. This causes many banshees to become sociopaths, unable to connect with metahumans or even other Infected. While they can feed through any potent emotional connection, they seem to prefer the "flavor" of terror and are optimized to bringing it out in abundance. Like vampires, they cannot hold down food or alcohol, maintaining an exclusively hemovoric diet.

Banshees lose almost all body fat and appear skeletal if they haven't fed. They have razor-sharp canines and eyeteeth, which they rarely bother to retract. They are always exceptionally pale, and eye glow usually manifests in shades of blue or violet.

Their physical enhancements are much like vampires, though their mental facilities do not develop as much. They can take mist form and regenerate, but also possess the ability to instill terror in their victims through inherent psycho-mystical powers. Some have also displayed an ability to manipulate sound, manifesting as a paralyzing scream, a subsonic negation field that creates a zone of silence, or a piercing shriek that can cause physical damage.

- You want to hear something really scary? One of my patrols ran across a banshee a few years back. Only two of them made it back. They said the banshee never made a sound. The scream came from my men.
- Picador

DZOO-NOO-QUA

A troll will express as this monstrosity. Until recently, dzoo-noo-qua were never reported as sapient, as the virus devolves their mental faculties. Some maintain their right state of mind, though, and are either terrifying juggernauts, or shockingly subtle predators. They don't seem to have a preference in emotional connection, though their nature usually instills terror, disgust, or rage. While they are omnivorous, they prefer raw flesh and will always choose metahuman flesh over any alternative.

Chaos rules the day in their physical appearance. Their dermal deposits overdevelop unevenly into armored plates, studded with nodules and spines. Muscles bulge, and horns sometimes grow longer while nails become extremely hard. Dental bones similarly grow in length, and the few dzoo-noo-qua who want to talk have to learn to navigate a mouth full of sharp teeth and long tusks. The mumbled lisps would be funny, if laughing wouldn't likely result in your head getting eaten. Their normally bloodshot eyes almost always glow a sickly yellow when their blood is up.

GOBLIN

The dwarf variant of Strain 1 Infected, these twisted creatures only rarely display intelligence or sapience. Unlike many Type 1s, they have the ability to eat anything, though their craving for metahuman flesh hints at their greater need for life energy. Much like the dzoo-noo-qua, they express no preferred emotional connection, but disgust and fear have most often turned up at forensic sites.

The virus causes the goblin to lose all body hair, and it consumes almost all body fat, leaving them looking emaciated; their skin sometimes takes on a sickly greenish tint. Ears become longer and sharper, eyes bloodshot and sometimes glowing greenish or yellow, and their salivary glands go into overproduction, leading to many feral specimens drooling uncontrollably.

- Post-transformation intelligence may be rare with goblins, but Goddess help you when it does happen. Just trust me on this one.
- Doc Fangs

VAMPIRE

The most common of Strain 1 Infected, and arguably the most sane, vampires are most often human, though theoretically any metahuman may express as a vampire instead of their metatype's common viral expression. Vampires almost always retain their sapience and sanity, at least at first, and are the most likely of the Strain 1s to try to integrate with normal society. The alternative is that they become among the most cautious, and therefore most dangerous, of stalkers. Their feeding

usually causes a sense of euphoria, often described as sexual in nature, though any sufficiently power emotional connection will do (rage, terror, etc). They can't eat or drink any substance other than blood, becoming ill within an hour after any consumption. Alcohol hits them even faster, inducing violent vomiting of blood.

Physically, they appear much as they did pre-infection, if a bit paler. Unlike other Infected, vampires lose buoyancy in water, making swimming very difficult. Usually they lose a little weight, and canines get a little longer and sharper; they extend during hunger, rage, and feeding, and retract once the vampire is satisfied. If starved, veins look darker and more pronounced, often in a violet shade, and their eye-glow is usually red. Some individuals may show some variation.

Vampires possess enhanced physical and mental attributes and increased reflexes, about twice those of an unaugmented metahuman. They often express the ability to regenerate non-magical, non-sunlight damage, and can take mist form.

- Is it true that mist-form Infected can be captured in vacuums? Or that they can flow into your lungs and then reform and explode you from inside?
- Whippet

- No and no. But it's nice to know someone else has been watching B-grade sims like *Severblight Requiem.*
- Red

WENDIGO

Perhaps the most horrific of all Infected, the wendigo is an ork with Strain 1 HMHVV. Wendigos are known for elaborate methods of feeding, fostering cannibal cults of otherwise normal metahumans, feasting on their polluted souls after they have committed murders on its command. Their cunning is exceptional, their depravity extreme. Almost all develop toxic shamanistic abilities, the better to hide their form and motive, though interestingly enough, they like to corrupt their cults through sheer charisma and not magical coercion.

Wendigos develop thick white pelts of fur, often growing in height and strength, in addition to all the abilities vampires possess. Long, black nails grow from bare, pale pink hands, and their teeth and tusks grow long and razor sharp. Their eyes may show a number of colors, ranging from yellow to blue to red, but I have most often seen them burn like orange coals.

- The fur is one of their distinguishing marks, but that has led to some unfortunate reports of sasquatches getting attacked out of fear or the desire to collect a bounty.
- Goat Foot

STRAIN 1A, BRUCKNER-LANGER STRAIN

(GHILANI VRYKOLAKIVIRIDAE SANGUISUGA)

An advanced subgroup of Strain 1, Bruckner Langer is more often than not fatal, meaning its victims are thankfully rare. Only two forms have been noted, though rumors persist of obscenely powerful elven manifestations.

MUTAQUA

No one's sure if the mutaqua is a result of experimentation or evolution, and I don't know which is scarier. Either way, this is what happens when a troll contracts Strain 1a. In addition to the physical effects of the virus, the mutaqua sees an increase in intelligence, as well as a banshee-like capacity to inspire supernatural fear and a resistance to hostile magic even as they gain access to Awakened abilities. While they still feed on metahuman life force like a nosferatu, they are more than happy to consume flesh while getting it.

Physically not too different from a dzoo-noo-qua, they do become even paler, with dermal deposits not just growing, but often manifesting as sharp spikes. Their eyes often burn a pure white.

NOSFERATU

A human successfully Infected with Type 1a becomes a nosferatu, arguably the most powerful Infected yet known. The nosferatu seem universally blessed with enhanced natural abilities and a talent for magic, but are plagued with psychological disorders. To a one they are paranoid, and many more develop megalomania, OCD, and other derangements that lead them to plot for greater security and power in isolation. Rumors place them as the shadowy power brokers and leaders of elite European cabals, wielding extensive political, financial, and magical influence. Nosferatu victims most often die in terror, providing the immortal monster with the emotional connection it needs to consume the poor soul.

Nosferatu lose almost all of their body hair. What little they keep becomes shock white, their flesh ashen and withered on bones as hard and cold as stone. Long nails grow from spidery hands, central incisors extend from their mouth in hook-like fangs. They need less feeding than other Infected, thankfully, yet somehow command inherent powers of mental dominance. They are the most likely to keep a cadre of Renfield-addicted pawns, and their slight form belies terrible strength. Their eyes may blaze blue or dull crimson.

STRAIN 2, JARKA-CRISCIONE STRAIN

(GHILANI MONERIVIRIDAE)

The second variant strain of HMHVV, Strain 2 is far more common than Strain 1 due to its greater capacity for transmission through Infected bodily fluids, generally entering through wounds caused by the attacking host. It is noted for its debilitating transformations and negative effect on the sanity of its carrier. All Strain 2 victims have a cannibalistic diet, though some may require more exotic or particular portions of their prey. The virus was once thought to only affect trolls and humans, but specimens have been found in the last decade of every metatype, proving that the virus is either evolving and adapting, or is continuing to grow in power as the Awakening continues.

BANDERSNATCH

The original non-human Infected, the bandersnatch is what happens when a sasquatch catches Strain 2. Voraciously hungry, territorial, and alarmingly fecund, the most noticeable quality of these beasts is how hard they are to notice. Their body is cloaked in a camouflage effect quite similar to ruthenium polymer, and their natural talent for stealth and mimicry means they are on you before you notice.

If a bandersnatch were to stop color-shifting, it would mainly resemble a sasquatch with a matted, unkempt pelt, though they have displayed pronounced and jagged teeth and claws, and suffer extreme mental degradation. If bandersnatches are still sapient, they have yet to show any sign past the most base, feral behavior.

- Why not just use thermoptics to spot them?
- Whippet

- You haven't been paying attention, have you? Infected are cold. Reduced circulation. You can usually spot them easier in a crowd that way, but when it comes to them sneaking up on you, it's about as bad as the normal visual spectrum. Unless they've just eaten, in which case they're probably just going to try and scare you off, anyway.
- Sticks

- Strain 1 Infected run a little cool, yes, but it's not as noticeable as you might think; you have to know what you're looking for. Strain 2, on the other hand, look more like their un-Infected counterparts, some running a little warmer than others. And the bandersnatch's adaptive coloration seems to mask their thermal signature. It's monumentally annoying when it's not actively perilous.
- Doc Fangs

FOMÓRAIG

Trolls Infected with Strain 2 express as fomóraig, a strange mishmash of mutations that seem more like the virus gone mad than working toward any unified hunting style. Many make for clever hunters, often using a variety of abilities to adapt to any circumstance, running prey to ground regardless of the obstacle. Most often found outside of metroplexes due to an allergy to air pollution, they tend to haunt the outskirts of rural outposts and towns, favoring marshes due to their adaptations.

Fomóraig find that their limbs grow longer and stronger. The upper layers of dermis calcify, with hands and feet covered in thick calluses that leave them almost numb. Under the skin, bony "chestnuts" form which secrete a corrosive acid. Further, they develop gill structures along their neck, and most curiously, have an inherent resistance to magical effects.

GNAWER

Discovered in 2071 in the old Cabrini Refuge in Chicago, gnawers are Strain 2 Infected dwarfs. Gnawers are notably more likely to maintain their sanity than most other Strain 2 hosts. They also represent the first potential complementary role to other Infected yet observed. Their dietary requirement, metahuman bones and marrow, make them worthy allies to flesh eating Infected, and they have been seen working with ghouls in the past. With a rock-like skin offering enhanced protection and a paranatural ability to command vermin, however, they are more than capable of subduing and stripping a corpse of its flesh on their own.

Gnawers appear largely as they did in life, though their skin becomes gray and quite rough to the touch. Their teeth become highly reinforced to crunch through bone, though they are not sharp enough to use for attack, suggesting the command and use of vermin is an evolutionary measure to access their sustenance.

- Rumor has it they're more than happy to work security with those vermin swarms, be it for a corp, commune, or gang. Trespasser beware.
- Sticks

GRENDEL

An ork Infected with Strain 2, these were first discovered in 2070 in the Pittsburgh metroplex. Grendels provide a strange deviation from other Infected, as they seem to act more as shy, solitary scavengers than predators. Their physical development suggests they are best adapted to surviving harsh subterranean environments. Indeed, everything about them suggests survival, better equipped for hiding and retreating than pursuit and subdual of prey. While they can breed, like other Strain 1 and 2 Infected, they do not seem to have any impetus to do so.

Grendels grow stronger, their arms becoming longer and providing the Infected with a startling speed when it moves as a quadruped. They develop a thick, matted coat across their body, and their tusks overdevelop, which might be a barrier to communication if any were yet found to display more than a feral intelligence. Their diet is possibly the most flexible of all Infected, truly omnivorous, though they prefer flesh and will consume metahuman meat first and foremost.

- Don't believe everything you read. Isolated reports from Paris suggest the grendel population in the catacombs is much denser than anyone ever suspected, and they move in groups. The really scary part? They seem to be extremely ... fecund, much like the orks they derive from. A large number of young have been seen in family units. And with that many mouths to feed, it's only a matter of time before they get aggressive.
- Frosty

- Infected that give birth to litters? Fuck. Guess I'm not going back to the city of lights any time soon ...
- Red Anya

HARVESTER

The first elves Infected with Strain 2 were discovered in Houston as early as 2069. Terrifying solitary predators, harvesters are twisted into creatures of sharp edges and speed, animal hunger and fury. Their fingers mutate into long bone claws, much like knives, while their speed and strength come in terrifying bursts that can equal those of a wired street samurai. These creatures exist with simple priorities: hunt, kill, feed, sleep. Highly territorial, even sapient Infected will happily put one of these poor monsters out of their misery.

- Some people say becoming Infected is a fate worse than death. That's debatable. But as far as harvesters go, whoever they were is already dead. You're just giving them peace.
- Hannibelle

- Don't people still say that about feral ghouls?
- 2XL

- You can see feral ghouls willing to cooperate with communities of their own, even willing to be reined in by the sane, smart ones. They're damaged, but they're still people. Harvesters are just psychotic hunter-killers. Put them down like a rogue drone.
- Hannibelle

LOUP-GAROU

When a human is Infected with Strain 2, they undergo a violent, painful transformation into these creatures. Growing a short greyish-black pelt, razor sharp teeth and claws, pure black eyes which possess thermographic vision, and significant muscle density growth, loup-garou are likely the source of legends about werewolves. They even display an allergic reaction to aconite and occasionally silver.

The transformation often damages the sanity of the loup-garou, leaving it animalistic and hostile, though some rare ones have managed to maintain their sapience, offering incredible insight into their existence. Even these sane cases must still contend with the most fearsome aspect of the loup-garou: during a four- to six-night period every lunar cycle, the loup-garou gains even greater speed and strength, as well as an uncontrollable urge to kill. This period is not, in fact, tied to the full moon, and every loup-garou has their own frenzy period, though packs may synchronize to each other over time.

Loup-garou have been displaying recent mutations, including enhanced reflexes much like a wired reflex system, as well as the ability to scale sheer surfaces. I know of one loup-garou who is attempting to counter his frenzy period with an implanted chemical gland and a counterbalance cocktail. He's also trying to get cerebral boosters and other mental enhancements, convinced that they will give him better control over his powerful instincts.

- Good luck finding a delta clinic, buddy.
- Butch

- Why not just roll up into any chop shop?
- Whippet

- Because most shops aren't equipped or able to deal with a highly contagious plague carrier, dumbass; delta clinics are. What's more, Infected generally have systems sensitive to implants, and bioware is even harder to code to them. It's even worse for Strain 1 Infected, since regeneration makes it a real pain in the ass; takes a delta clinic and 'ware to counter all that.
- Butch

TYPE 3, KRIEGER STRAIN

(GHILANI WICHTIVIRIDAE)

Strain 3 HMHVV produces only one kind of Infected: ghouls. You already know about these; they're the urban boogeymen of every metroplex in the world. Stricken blind by milky-white cataracts, their acquisition of astral sight, along with enhanced hearing and smell, makes them able hunters. All body hair falls out as their hides gain a scabrous texture; nails grow black and thicken to be usable in combat, good at digging, and useful in tearing the flesh from victims. Ghouls often organize in packs and may retain their intellect or be driven mad or feral by the pain of transformation. Their diet is entirely uncooked meat, of which a sizable portion must be of metahuman origin.

The Krieger strain is the most virulent and contagious form of HMHVV in the world, with an estimate by Shiawase last year suggesting they compose ninety to ninety-five percent of the total Infected population globally. This may explain their prominence in the public imagination, often eclipsing the more glamorous vampire by virtue of distribution and likelihood of encounter. Ghouls have a greater presence in the political world as well, from the streets as the 162 ghoul street gang, to the Ghoul Liberation League policlub, to the African nation of Asamando, largely populated by ghouls and ruled by a ghoul queen. Ghouls remain the subject of an ongoing bequest of the late President Dunklezhan's will, promising considerable money to the first party to develop a synthetic substitute for ghoul consumption. Thus far, no one seems to have made significant progress.

Ghouls display the usual sensitivity to cybernetic implantation, though many who can afford to get cybereyes to restore their conventional vision, or biosculpting to hide their nature from the casual observer.

- This is the one kind of job a black clinic might be willing to do. Ghouls make for pretty good security, they accept pay in medical waste, and there's enough documented procedure to make simple implants doable. Of course, you've got to sterilize the shit out of the lab afterwards.
- Butch

- You mean you don't normally?!
- Bull

- I do. But plenty of back-alley clinics are run by lazy assholes. Buyer beware.
- Butch

GAME INFORMATION

All Strain 1 and 1a Infected have certain traits in common. Damage taken due to their Allergy to Sunlight (if any) cannot be healed with Regeneration, even after they are no longer being exposed. Normal and magical healing still work.

Unless noted otherwise, all Infected may be adepts, magicians, or mystic adepts. They always have a Magic rating, whether they are magically active or not. The starting Magic rating for Strain 1 Infected is equal to 6

or their Essence, whichever is lower. This Magic rating does not include any Initiation ranks an NPC might have if they are magically active.

BANDERSNATCH

The Strain 2 expression of the sasquatch, the bandersnatch is leaner than its non-Infected counterpart. Its fur is typically shaggy and matted; along with the more pronounced teeth and longer arms, the fur lends the bandersnatch a more animalistic appearance than the sasquatch. At least when it can be seen—their fur also aids in bending light around the critter, camouflaging it against the surrounding terrain.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
9	3	5	9	5	2	6	1	2	5	4

Initiative	11 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Condition Monitor	13/11
Limits	Physical 11, Mental 5, Social 4
Armor	0
Skills	Animal Calls (Professional Knowledge) 8, Assensing 6, Athletics skill group 4, Perception 6, Sneaking 10, Unarmed Combat 7
Powers	Adaptive Coloration, Dual Natured, Mimicry, Natural Weapon (Bite: (STR+1)P, AP –1, –1 Reach), Natural Weapon (Claw: (STR+2)P, AP –1), Sapience
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Mild), Dietary Requirement (Metahuman Flesh)
Notes	+1 Reach.

BANSHEE

The Strain 1 expression of an elf, the banshee is virtually indistinguishable from its non-Infected cousin, save for their gaunt frame and pallid complexion. Over time, a banshee's natural skin and hair color fade, with the skin becoming slightly translucent.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
4	4	5	4	4	3	4	6	2	6	*

Initiative	9 + 2D6
Movement	x3/x5/+3
Condition Monitor	10/10
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 5, Social 6–10 (depending on Essence)
Armor	0
Skills	Perception 6, Sneaking 9, Unarmed Combat 6
Powers	Dual Natured, Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Low-Light Vision, Smell), Essence Drain, Fear, Immunity (Age, Pathogens, Toxins), Infection, Mist Form, Natural Weapon (Bite: (STR+1)P, AP –1, –1 Reach), Paralyzing Howl, Regeneration, Sapience
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Severe), Dietary Requirement (Metahuman Blood), Essence Loss, Vulnerability (Silver), Vulnerability (Wood)
Notes	Banshees can consume only blood, and they suffer nausea (p. 409, *SR5*) within an hour when they consume anything else. * Magic is equal to 6 or Essence, whichever is lower.

DZOO-NOO-QUA

The Strain 1 expression in trolls, dzoo-noo-qua are grotesque and frightening figures. The virus causes the troll's dermal deposits to become irregular spikes and nodules, and it also significantly increases their muscle mass.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
9	2	5	9	4	2	4	1	2	2D6	*

Initiative	9 + 2D6
Movement	x3/x5/+2
Condition Monitor	13/10
Limits	Physical 11, Mental 4, Social 2–6 (depending on Essence)
Armor	4
Skills	Aaawnsing 4, Athletics skill group 4, Counterspelling 6, Intimidation 6, Perception 7, Unarmed Combat 7
Powers	Armor (4), Dual Natured, Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Thermographic Vision), Essence Drain, Immunity (Age, Toxins), Infection, Magical Guard (self only; p. 196, Street Grimoire), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+1)P, AP –1, –1 Reach), Natural Weapon (Claw: DV (STR+2)P, AP –1), Regeneration, Sapience
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Moderate), Dietary Requirement (Metahuman Flesh), Essence Loss
Notes	+1 Reach. * Magic is equal to 6 or Essence, whichever is lower.

FOMÓRAIG

This is the expression of Strain 2 in trolls. As with the dzoo-noo-qua, the virus increases both muscle mass and dermal bone deposits. The latter take the form of bony "chestnuts" surrounded by acid-secreting glands. They have jagged claws on both their hands and feet, and typically have long, shaggy manes.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
10	2	4	10	4	1	3	1	2	5	3

Initiative	7 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x4/+1
Condition Monitor	13/10
Limits	Physical 12, Mental 3, Social 4
Armor	3
Skills	Assensing 3, Athletics skill group 4, Counterspelling 6, Intimidation 6, Perception 6, Unarmed Combat 7
Powers	Armor (3), Corrosive Secretions, Dual Natured, Magical Guard (self only; p. 196, Street Grimoire), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+1)P, AP –1, –1 Reach), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV (STR+2)P, AP –1), Sapience
Weaknesses	Allergy (Air Pollution, Moderate), Allergy (Sunlight, Moderate), Dietary Requirement (Metahuman Flesh)
Notes	Fomóraig have +1 Reach. Cooked meat makes them sick and causes nausea (p. 409, *SR5*).

GNAWER

A dwarf with Strain 2, a gnawer resembles a statue of a normal dwarf. The virus transforms the skin into a tough, stone-like surface, which offers a little bit of natural armor.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
6	3	4	7	5	7	5	2	2	5	3

Initiative	9 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x4/+1
Condition Monitor	11/11
Limits	Physical 8, Mental 5, Social 5
Armor	2
Skills	Assensing 3, Perception 5, Sneaking 6, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Animal Control (Vermin), Armor (2), Dual Natured, Enhanced Sense (Thermographic Vision), Immunity (Toxins), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+2)P, AP 0, –1 Reach), Noxious Breath, Paralyzing Touch, Sapience
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Moderate), Dietary Requirement (Metahuman Bone)
Notes	Charisma score for purposes of the Animal Control power is the gnawer's natural Charisma + 2.

GOBLIN

Goblins are the Strain 1 expression in dwarfs. They are skeletal figures; the virus causes the loss of all body hair and nearly all body fat, leaving its skin stretched tightly over wiry muscles. Goblin ears are almost comically long and pointed, which contributes to their monstrous appearance. They typically have a sickeningly sweet body odor which grows stronger over time.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
6	3	4	6	5	7	5	2	2	2D6	*

Initiative	9 + 2D6
Movement	x3/x5/+2
Condition Monitor	11/11
Limits	Physical 8, Mental 4, Social 4–7 (depending on Essence)
Armor	0
Skills	Assensing 4, Perception 6, Sneaking 8, Unarmed Combat 6
Powers	Dual Natured, Enhanced Senses (Smell, Taste, Thermographic Vision), Essence Drain, Immunity (Age, Fire, Toxins), Infection, Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+1)P, AP –1, Reach –1), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV (STR+2)P, AP –1), Regeneration, Sapience
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Moderate), Dietary Requirement (Metahuman Flesh), Essence Loss, Vulnerability (Iron)
Notes	Like the dwarfs they were, goblins receive +2 dice for pathogen resistance. Goblins cannot digest heavily processed foods, and they suffer nausea (p. 409, SR5) when they eat them. * Magic is equal to 6 or Essence, whichever is lower.

GRENDEL

An ork with Strain 2, the grendel is a brutal-looking beast. The ork's profuse body hair grows into a shaggy pelt, the tusks become extremely pronounced, and the arms become strikingly elongated. This enables a grendel to move with remarkable speed on all fours.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
8	3	4	8	4	1	4	1	1	5	3

Initiative	8 + 1D6
Movement	x3/x6/+4
Condition Monitor	12/10
Limits	Physical 10, Mental 4, Social 4
Armor	0
Skills	Assensing 3, Gymnastics 4, Perception 6, Sneaking 7, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Animal Control (Subterranean Critters), Concealment (self only), Dual Natured, Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision, Smell, Thermographic Vision), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+1)P, AP –1, –1 Reach), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV (STR+1)P, AP –1), Paralyzing Touch, Sapience
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Moderate), Dietary Requirement (Metahuman Flesh)
Notes	Charisma score for purposes of the Animal Control power is the grendel's natural Charisma + 3. Grendels have +1 Reach.

HARVESTER

This is the expression of Strain 2 in elves. The harvester is not as lean as normal elves, and their fingernails become elongated, knife-like claws. Their mouths are also enlarged, and filled with razor-sharp, pointed teeth.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
5	4	6	6	4	1	5	1	2	5	3

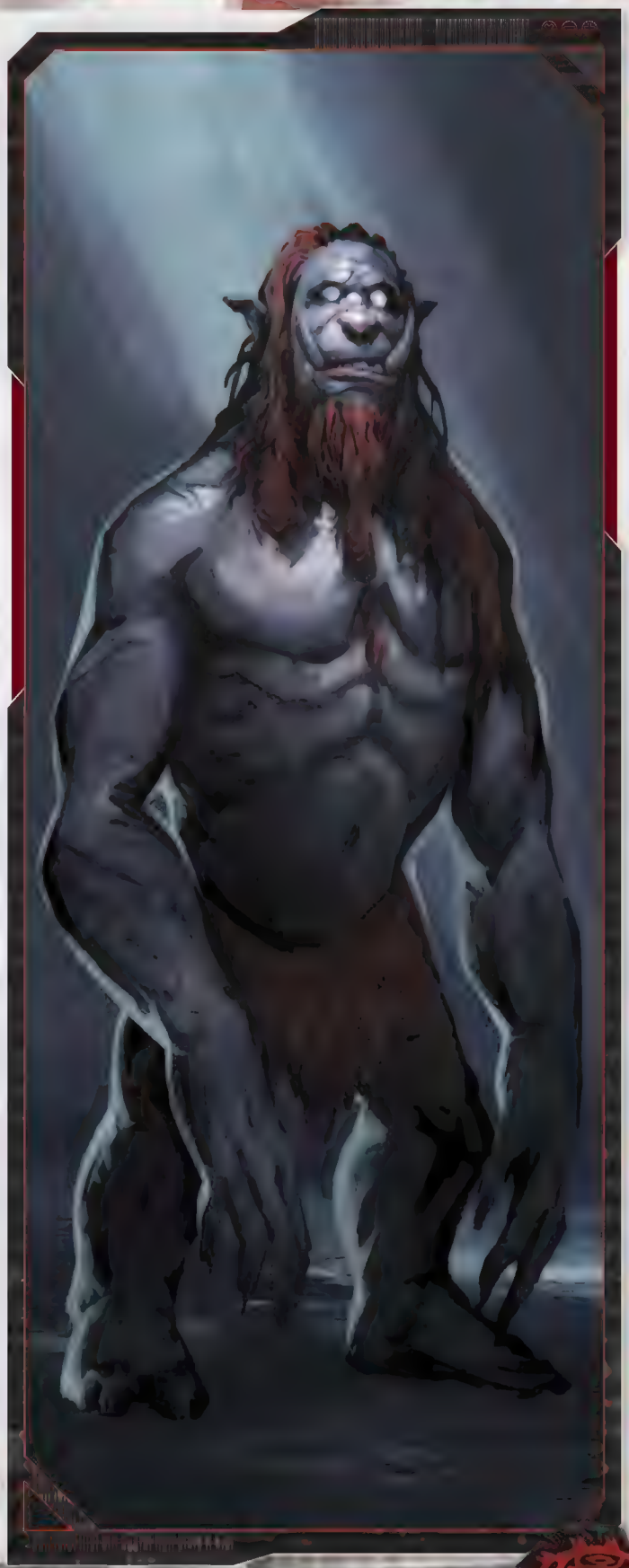
Initiative	11 + 2D6
Movement	x3/x5/+3
Condition Monitor	11/10
Limits	Physical 8, Mental 4, Social 4
Armor	2
Skills	Assensing 3, Athletics skill group 6, Intimidation 4, Perception 5, Sneaking 4, Unarmed Combat 7
Powers	Armor (2), Dual Natured, Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision, Thermographic Vision), Movement (self only), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+1)P, AP –1, –1 Reach), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV (STR+3)P, AP –3), Sapience
Weaknesses	Allergy (Silver, Moderate), Allergy (Sunlight, Moderate)

LOUP-GAROU

The loup-garou is a human Infected with Strain 2. The virus leaves the body covered in short, fine fur. The victim's fingernails lengthen into hardened claws, and the lips draw back to reveal sharp teeth with particularly pronounced canines.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
4	3	4	7	4	2	4	1	2	5	3

Initiative	8 + 2D6
Movement	x3/x5/+3
Condition Monitor	10/10
Limits	Physical 8, Mental 4, Social 4
Armor	2
Skills	Assensing 5, Athletics skill group 6, Perception 6, Sneaking 6, Unarmed Combat 8
Powers	Armor (2), Dual Natured, Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Low-Light Vision, Smell, Thermographic Vision), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+2)P, AP –2, –1 Reach), Natural Weapon (Claw: DV (STR+3)P, AP –2), Sapience
Weaknesses	Allergy (Aconite, Moderate), Allergy (Sunlight, Severe), Dietary Requirement (Metahuman Flesh)
Notes	The loup-garou's power fluctuates over the course of a lunar month, but this cycle is not, as legend would have it, tied to the phase of the moon. During the four-day peak of this twenty-eight-day cycle, a loup-garou becomes savage and goes berserk as a Bear shaman (p. 321, *SR5*) that fights as if it had a Rating 3 adrenaline pump (p. 459, *SR5*).



MUTAQUA

The mutaqua is the result of Strain 1a in trolls. These extremely rare monstrosities are grotesquely deformed, with stark white skin, heavy musculature, massive claws and teeth, and extensive, asymmetrical dermal bone deposits.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
3	3	5	10	5	2	4	1	2	3.6	1

Initiative	9 + 2D6
Movement	x3/x5/+2
Condition Monitor	13/11
Limits	Physical 12, Mental 5, Social 4–9 (depending on Essence)
Armor	5
Skills	Assensing 5, Athletics skill group 5, Counterspelling 6, Intimidation 7, Perception 6, Sneaking 7, Unarmed Combat 7
Powers	Armor 5, Dual Natured, Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Low-Light Vision, Thermographic Vision), Essence Drain, Fear, Immunity (Age, Toxins), Infection, Magical Guard (self only; p. 196, Street Grimoire), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+1)P, AP –1, –1 Reach), Natural Weapon (Claw: DV (STR+2)P, AP –1), Regeneration, Sapience
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Extreme), Allergy (Wood, Severe), Dietary Requirement (Metahuman Flesh), Essence Loss, Vulnerability (Fire)
Notes	+1 Reach. A mutaqua can increase its Essence up to three times its natural maximum. A mutaqua only loses one point of Essence every two months. All mutaqua are adepts, and the gamemaster should assign them appropriate adept powers. Their starting adept power points are equal to their Magic rating. * Magic is equal to 6 or Essence, whichever is lower.

NOSFERATU

These are humans Infected with Strain 1a. They become very pale and gaunt, and they also lose all of their body and facial hair. Their incisors and canine teeth grow sharper and become somewhat more pronounced.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
4	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	2	3*	*

Initiative	9 + 2D6
Movement	x3/x5/+3
Condition Monitor	10/11
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 7, Social 6–11 (depending on Essence)
Skills	Assensing 6, Conjuring skill group 6, Influence skill group 6, Perception 8, Sneaking 8, Sorcery skill group 7, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Compulsion, Dual Natured, Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Low-Light Vision, Thermographic Vision), Essence Drain, Fear, Immunity (Age, Pathogens, Toxins), Infection, Influence, Natural Weapon (Bite: (STR+1)P, AP –1, –1 Reach), Regeneration, Sapience
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Extreme), Allergy (Wood, Severe), Dietary Requirement (Metahuman Blood), Essence Loss, Induced Dormancy (Lack of Air, (Essence) Minutes)
Notes	A nosferatu can increase its Essence up to three times its natural maximum. A nosferatu only loses one point of Essence every four months. All nosferatu are magicians. Nosferatu can consume only blood, and they suffer Nausea (p. 409, *SR5*) within an hour when they consume anything else. Nosferatu have less buoyancy than humans and receive a –4 dice pool modifier to all swimming-related tests. * Magic is equal to 6 or Essence, whichever is lower.

WENDIGO

The wendigo is the expression of Strain 1 in orks. The transformation is dramatic, with the victim gaining an average of forty centimeters in height, with a commensurate increase in muscle mass. They also grow a thick coat of white fur. The fingernails harden into formidable claws, and both the upper and lower canine teeth become very pronounced.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
8	3	6	6	4	3	4	4	3	2.85	*

Initiative	9 + 2D6
Movement	x3/x5/+3
Condition Monitor	12/10
Limits	Physical 9, Mental 5, Social 5–8 (depending on Essence)
Armor	0
Skills	Assensing 4, Astral Combat 5, Conjuring skill group 5, Intimidation 6, Perception 6, Sneaking 7, Sorcery skill group 6, Unarmed Combat 7
Powers	Dual Natured, Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Low-Light Vision, Smell, Visual Acuity), Essence Drain, Fear, Immunity (Age, Pathogens, Toxins), Infection, Influence, Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+1)P, AP –1, –1 Reach), Natural Weapon (Claw: DV (STR+2)P, AP –1), Regeneration, Sapience
Weaknesses	Allergy (Ferrous Metals, Moderate), Allergy (Sunlight, Severe), Dietary Requirement (Metahuman Flesh), Essence Loss
Notes	All wendigos are magicians or mystic adepts. If the latter, the gamemaster should assign them appropriate adept powers. The value of their starting adept power points is equal to their Magic rating.* Magic is equal to 6 or Essence, whichever is lower.

MUTANTS & TOXIC CRITTERS

POSTED BY: G-NOME

Mother Nature tries hard to maintain the purity of her creations, but man's ignorance of the corruption he slathers upon the world around him often overcomes existing natural systems for genetic stability. I've done my fair share of digging and set others upon the path toward these mishaps of nature, and gifting this research to the shadows is the best I can hope to accomplish with information that goes a long way to besmirch the image of the corporate forces that control the world.

While several other biologists and I gathered much of the data here, there are parts of the natural world that many will not dive into, even if it is just to study from afar. For that, I asked Hannibelle to look at how the corruptions that have twisted Mother Nature have affected those stricken with HMHVV. What she returned was not exactly what I thought it would be, but it is extremely informative and fragging scary. But first, let's look at horrible mutant and toxic critters that are *not* Infected.

AMPHORA MITE

CIMEX AMPHORIUS

Terrain: Urban
Diet: Hemovore
Activity: All
Aggro Index: 10.0
Length/Height: 0.01m
Mass: 0.0007 kg

Considered to be the bedbug from hell, amphora mites have been the latest tourist plague since Norovirus N133 of 2044 and doesn't seem like it will be contained. With all the tailored drugs, genetic manipulations, and chemical pollutants, it's a wonder bedbugs survive feeding on their hosts. In this case, the mutated bedbug not only survives, but its super-strong gut can manage and make an ugly cocktail after digesting metahuman blood.

Adult amphora mites grow to a considerable one centimeter in length, with most of that girth being its abdomen. Though unless you are wearing a hermetically sealed suit, they will find a way to bite you. Amphora mites were once only found in the CAS, but they have since spread to dive motels in most major cities.

- Black-market trade of reused furniture has been a huge factor in their migration. Corporate hotels/motels get new corporate furniture from their parents, but mom-and-pop places have to scrounge from "fire sales" and the like.
- Ecotope

- They're horribly difficult to get rid of once they've infested a spot. You have to get some pretty toxic stuff, since they can endure most poisons on the market.
- KAM

A bite from one of these things is annoying, but it's much worse if they fed on a few people before they got to you. These mites accumulate chemicals from each host, which starts a reaction in their gut. After consuming blood from several victims, the bug must purge itself of the undigested material. So when it meets the next victim, it vomits the chemical into the victim's bloodstream before feeding again. While one bite may not be effective, it's usually when the whole family (twenty or thirty mites) feed together that the toxin has a noticeable effect on the person.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
0	7	2	0	1	2	1	1	3	6

Initiative	3 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x2/+1
Condition Monitor	*/9
Limits	Physical 1, Mental 2, Social 3
Armor	0
Skills	Climbing 6, Sneaking 8
Powers	Enhanced Sense (Thermal), Venom (Vector: Injection, Speed: 2 Combat Turns, Penetration: 0, Power: 10, Effect: See sidebar)
Weaknesses	Dietary Requirement (metahuman blood)
Note	The base physical Condition Monitor is 5, but it reduces when it has recently fed, as it is swollen with blood. Right after it feeds, the Condition Monitor drops to 3 boxes, increasing by 1 each hour.

AMPHORA TOXIN

This table is a list of possible toxins that the amphora mite can transmit to the victim. This effect lasts for 1D6 days. The gamemaster can roll or choose the toxin affecting the victim.

ROLL	TYPE	DESCRIPTION
1	Toxic Reaction	Victim has a bad reaction with skin blisters and rash (use PepperPunch, but change speed to 1 day. This will keep occurring daily for the duration of the amphora toxin).
2	Hormone Imbalance	The toxin simulates a hormone imbalance in the victim, causing their body to be "out of sorts." Reduce Social limit by 2 for the duration.
3	Food Allergy	As with a tick bite, the victim becomes mildly allergic to food, in this case soy. Increase the level of allergy if victim is already allergic to soy.
4	Hyper	Victim is unable to sleep (similar to the effect of long haul, p. 412, *SR5*)
5	Recreational Drug	Gamemaster picks one of the regular drugs, and the victim experiences its effects for the duration of the toxin, including side effects.
6	Recreational Drug	Gamemaster picks an Awakened drug, and the victim experiences its effects for the duration of the toxin, including side effects.

ANGEL SQUIRREL

GLAUCOMYS TELI RADIUM

Terrain: Forest
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 7.8
Length/Height: 0.29 m
Mass: 0.98 kg

I'm educated enough to understand that the power of the atom is not a bad thing, but metahumanity really needs to take a little more time, or maybe just a lot more precautions, when harnessing it as an energy supply. The angel squirrel is a radiation-induced mutation of the bombardier. Any members of the species exposed to excessive levels of radiation over an extended period of time have an inactive section of their genome activated that modifies their offspring to absorb radioactive particles with little damage to their own tissue while creating a focused source of radioactive energy equivalent to ground zero at the Trojan-Satsop plant.

The squirrel itself has had little of its physiology affected by the radiation, though it has experienced small adaptations to better cling to potential prey. The squirrel will usually glide down onto unsuspecting prey and let the toxicity of its biology bring them down. At times, their prey realizes something is wrong and will attempt to flee or flail in order to buck the small, flying rodent. The angel squirrel has a series of small dermal protrusions, like hooks, attached to their arms. These help them stay clung to a target while they let their poisonous nature do the dirty-bomb work.

Groups of this particular breed will live together in tall-tree forests, where they nest high in the trees. Their nesting locations are often obvious due to the excessive damage done to the trees in the vicinity, but their radiation exposure zone is relatively small. Their glandular structure somehow limits the release of radioactive particles and therefore prevents them from being radio-toxic beyond a range of a meter or so. I'm personally trying to investigate how this biological function operates, but research is extremely difficult on a species that causes severe radiation poisoning to anyone within arm's length.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
1	5	4	1	3	3	4	3	3	5	5

Initiative	8 + 2D6
Movement	x1/x3/+1 (x2/x5/+1 Flight)
Condition Monitor	3/9
Limits	Physical 3, Mental 4, Social 6
Armor	1
Skills	Flight 3, Gymnastics 8, Perception 6, Running 3, Unarmed Combat 2
Powers	Armor (1), Binding, Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Smell), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV 6P, AP –6), Energy Aura (Radiation)
Weaknesses	Fragile (6)
Note	–1 Reach

BLINK SLOTH

BRADYPUS HERMES

Terrain: Jungle
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Diurnal

Aggro Index: 5.0
Length/Height: 1.2 m
Mass: 56 kg

Studying these in the wild was an amazing experience up until they realized that we were edible. The blink sloth (*Bradypus hermes*) is a corrupted version of the three-toed sloth (*Bradypus variegatus*) growing in number along the Amazon river due to toxic dumping by S-K subsidiary Blankenvort Industrial in 2075. As if mocking man's view of the slow-and-steady sloth, the blink sloth can make lightning-quick moves and deliver devastating attacks with the terrifying claws the sloth usually uses to hang from branches.

Blink sloths are nearly identical to their normal relatives with the exception of sharp teeth and slightly longer claws. They are also just as slow as regular sloths most of the time but burst into action when needed. That's what happened in our study. We were observing interactions between the sloths and one of their primary predators, the Yacara caiman, when a member of our team was attacked by a jaguar. The jaguar killed him quick and clean but didn't get to enjoy a meal. A blink sloth flashed over and gutted the jaguar and then dragged it off for a meal. The next week we were watching when the blink sloth went after another member of the research team. It was a quick kill, and then it lifted Daniel up into the canopy. The next appearance had the security detail on edge, and when the blink sloth came after another of us they hit it with a taser. It bolted and we left, convinced that we were a little further down the food web.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
							4	2	6

Initiative	16 + 5D6
Movement	x2/x6/+5*
Condition Monitor	11/10
Limits	Physical 8, Mental 4, Social 6
Armor	4
Skills	Gymnastics 5, Perception 6, Running 8, Sneaking 4, Unarmed Combat 9
Powers	Armor (4), Brachiation, Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Smell), Immunity (Toxins), Natural Weapon (Claws/Bite: DV 9P, AP –6)
Weaknesses	Reduced Senses (Sight)
Note	*The blink sloth is usually slow. The listed Movement Rates are only when it is attacking.

CONWAY'S CHEETAH

ACINONYX CONWAY

Terrain: Grassland
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Nocturnal
Aggro Index: 3.4
Length/Height: 1.98 m
Mass: 92 kg

I have taken several trips to Africa, and few were as productive and inspirational as the one that brought about the discovery of Conway's cheetah. First, I must acknowledge that the continent has been without a species of cheetah for over forty years. The last sighting of a live, wild specimen of the African subspecies of cheetah was verified in 2032. My trip brought me close to an iridium mine in Azania, one hundred kilometers west of Serowe. This is where I first encountered this unique, six-legged variant of the standard cheetah. The spots were there, but I was still astonished to see even a variant species of something I had thought extinct for almost half a century.

Conway's cheetah hunts in the areas around the former mine by night and lives within the mine by day. The behavior is both an adaptation to improve their hunting chances, preventing prey from seeing them coming, but also a biological necessity, as I observed one specimen that was injured and unable to make it back to the mine before sunrise suffer serious tissue damage from exposure to the sun. I initially thought it would be best to end the creature's suffering humanely and quickly, but after some examination I wondered if it might have a chance to heal. So I used my tent to shield it from the sun. At sundown, the creature emerged, looking quite haggard, and hunted me down at my camp a kilometer off. It had the tent draped over its back as it approached, and once it was close it shrugged it off, stared at me for a solid minute, started walking off, stopped and turned back, started walking again, stopped and turned back again, and repeated this several more times until I got up and started to follow.

I was led to the mine and allowed inside, among the coalition of cheetahs. The radiation level in the mine was too high for me to stay long, but the invitation provided a perfect opportunity to grab the files I needed off the mine's isolated system. This is where I found the notes from Conway, who was also allowed among the coalition but didn't know he was being exposed to radiation until it was too late.

Conway documented the cheetahs he encountered and had small files on more than seventy distinct individuals. Quite the population, and far more than were currently within the mine. The others must have branched off to form their own coalition at another location. Conway's cheetahs are highly social and very intelligent. They are physically larger than their progenitors, with an additional pair of legs. Conway's reports, and my eventual monitoring, demonstrated the cheetah's reaching straight-line speeds in excess of 160 kph, far faster than their progenitors. Their additional legs provided not only a boost to speed but also to the agility and ability to make sharp turns. In the three weeks I spent monitoring this coalition, I never once saw a failed attack. While cheetahs have long been known to have terrible hunting percentages, the Conway's cheetah breaks the mold.

It is also an important point to mention my treatment at their hands, and the treatment of Dr. Conway, are rare exceptions. I twice saw metahumans taken down by the

cheetahs during my study, and Conway's notes mentioned them making meals of several metahumans.

- You see these things going after a person and you don't help. That's cold.
- Hard Exit

- That's the law of the jungle. I didn't help the cheetah or the person. I just observed. It may be "cold" to others, but it's good how you do research.
- G-Nome

- Some of these things have been tagged and captured. I ran into a pair that were trained guards for an Azanian chief while I was doing a little recon for a corp in the area.
- Balladeer

- MCT has a few things that fit this critter's description running around their Zero Zone at a facility in northwestern Azania. I figured they were vat jobs, but that may be what happened to the others from the mine.
- Stone

- I've heard rumors of a six-legged leopard in the jungles of Asamando, but I'm not going to go check up on that one. Maybe you could, G-Nome?
- Clockwork

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
7	8	6	6	5	3	6	4	3	6	6

Initiative	12 + 3D6
Movement	x2/x6/+5
Condition Monitor	12/11
Limits	Physical 9, Mental 5, Social 7
Armor	6
Skills	Perception 7, Running 10, Sneaking 5, Tracking 4, Unarmed Combat 8
Powers	Armor (6), Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Smell, Motion Detection), Immunity (Radiation, Toxins), Movement (Self), Natural Weapon (Claws/Bite: DV 8P, AP –2), Pounce (must Run, successful attack causes Knockdown)
Note	+1 Reach

FLATWORM VIPER

BIPALIUM VIPERIDAE

Terrain: Urban/Forest
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: All
Aggro Index: 6.4
Length/Height: 1.0 m
Mass: 5.2 kg

The flatworm viper is from a family of land planarians. While the largest known flatworm can grow to sixty centimeters, the flatworm viper grows to a meter in length or more. These toxic critters have been found in many industrial complexes and dumps where there is less-than-ideal maintenance, allowing the flatworm viper to be content to grow and breed in humid environments. These creatures are dark brown with a black stripe that can flash neon blue when threatened, warning other predators of its toxicity.

- Heh, "less-than-ideal" means enough chemical leakage to have standing pools but small enough to bribe away if necessary.
- Ecotope

The flatworm viper will eat snails, worms, and animals up to the size of rodents. It does this by projecting one sharp "fang" to inject a necrotoxin similar to adder poison into its prey. As the prey dies, this fang has a second use as a straw allowing the flatworm viper to suck the fluid from destroyed cells. While it's called a fang, it's a segmented tube from its digestive system that locks into place as the flatworm's muscles contract to propel it into its prey at high speeds. Flatworm vipers are hermaphroditic, allowing any pair of vipers to create a brood. Their eggs are also quite small, so migration can be done through people literally stepping in a puddle, and the eggs will get impeded like sand. Flatworm vipers live in broods of seven to ten, so falling into their nest can be fatal.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
1	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	3	6

Initiative	3 + 2D6
Movement	x2/x3/+1
Condition Monitor	6/9
Limits	Physical 2, Mental 2, Social 3
Armor	0
Skills	Perception 2, Sneaking 4, Unarmed Combat 3
Powers	Natural Weapon (Fang: DV 2P, AP –3), Venom (Vector: Injection, Speed: 2 Combat Turns, Penetration: 0, Power: 12, Effect: Physical Damage)
Weaknesses	Fragile (3)

GLOW RAT

RATTUS DIABOLIS RADIUM

Terrain: Urban
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Nocturnal
Aggro Index: 5.8
Length/Height: 1.1 m
Mass: 4.3 kg

As if devil rats and demon rats weren't bad enough, glow rats had to join the family. The result of an ever-growing devil rat population near toxic sites around

the world, the glow rat is a mutated devil rat with all the glorious gifts of a standard devil rat plus the ability to projectile vomit a vile radioactive concoction of stomach acid and an insoluble phlegm. The acid is relatively mild as acids go, but the phlegm keeps the acid and the radioactive elements in contact with their victim for an extended period. After an attack, the glow rats will retreat and then follow the creature they've attacked from a safe distance while the radiation slowly weakens them.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
2	5	5	1	3	2	5	5	2	6	4

Initiative	10 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x2/+1
Condition Monitor	9/10
Limits	Physical 3, Mental 4, Social 7
Armor	2
Skills	Exotic Ranged Weapon (Spit) 6, Gymnastics 5, Perception 4, Running 2, Sneaking 6, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Animal Control (Mundane Rodents), Armor (2), Concealment (Self Only), Corrosive Spit, Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision), Immunity (Toxins), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV 2P, AP —), Venom (Vector: Contact, Speed: Instant, Penetration: –6, Power: 10, Effect: Agony, Nausea, Disorientation, Stun Damage)
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Mild)
Note	–1 Reach

HELLCOW

BOS MALUS

Terrain: Prairie
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 7.8
Length/Height: 1.78 m
Mass: 1,310 kg

After a trip to India and seeing the holy herd they have there, I wanted more information on the behaviors of this species in the wild. Its voracious appetite makes it a bane on cattle communities when one is born, because even from the moment of birth, the animal's thick hide, massive teeth, and unpleasant demeanor make it quite formidable. The infection itself is caused by a prion, similar to mad cow disease, but rather than attacking the cow, it attacks their offspring. From birth they eat everything in sight, including metal, tools, and their mother, until they are full, all thanks to their incredibly corrosive saliva.

When full, the hellcow is quite sedentary, but their high metabolism leaves them full for only a short time. Ranchers with a creative mind have often segregated their hellcow calves to the outskirts of their farms and supplied food stores of junk material to keep them fed. The hellcows provide a layer of security from other predators, while also keeping them separated from uninfected stock.

- I saw a place up in Snohomish in Seattle that uses a herd of hellcows as site security on a farm that plays as cover for bio lab.
- Sounder

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
10	3	3	8	1	1	1	1	2	6

Initiative	4 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x5/+4
Condition Monitor	13/9
Limits	Physical 10, Mental 2, Social 3
Armor	10
Skills	Exotic Ranged Weapon (Spit) 4, Perception 4, Running 4, Unarmed Combat 7
Powers	Armor (10), Corrosive Spit, Immunity (Pathogens, Toxins)
Weaknesses	Reduced Senses (Smell)

IRIDESCENT OWL

BUHO ARSENICUM

Terrain: Forest
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Nocturnal
Aggro Index: 6.8
Length/Height: 1.12m (3.56m wingspan)
Mass: 8.6kg

The iridescent owl can very quickly turn a pleasant walk in the coastal rainforests around Seattle into a dire emergency with an immediate need for medical attention. The progenitor species Buho virginianus saturatus, the coastal great horned owl, either had a SURGE event, or the iridescent owl arose from a previously unknown paranormal variant. The species are instantly identifiable by the coloration in their feathers. While the standard species tends toward earth tones, the iridescent owls earned their name from their coloration. Their feathers carry the eerie iridescent sheen familiar to anyone who has seen an oil slick on water. The color comes from the toxic nature of the species and the concentration of heavy metals and petrochemicals in their system.

The feathers have a second toxin-induced quality, and this is the one that makes encountering one of these things so potentially life-threatening. The iridescent feathers along the edge of its wings are a concentration point for heavy metals that this species takes in from its prey. The iridescent owl hunts prey near former mining areas and dump sites for toxic waste where many of the species pick up extremely high levels of heavy metals from the water, as well as the natural progression of heavy metal concentration increasing as we move up the food chain. But back to the point of the feathers. The metals concentrate and actually turn these feathers into metal. A weight increase and concentration in the wings would normally doom anything that relies on flight to a slow death, the iridescent owl not only eats well but kills much of its food by "throwing" razor-sharp metal feathers that happen to contain ultra-toxic levels of heavy metals. A slick new trick for the wise old owl.

The "throwing" process is actually quite a sight to behold, as they spin to build speed and then lash out a wing to unleash the rain of deadly feathers.

The iridescent owl is not only a target of talisleggers who think any critter that's new big and shiny must be magical, but also mining companies that are trying to find ways for the owls to be trained to hunt near mines so that they can subsequently harvest the feathers.

- I can attest to the toxic nature of these things. I was running electronic eyes and ears for a runner crew up near Vancouver when one of these things swooped by and sent a hail of feathers at the sammy. He was wired and avoided most of the barrage but got a couple slices on his calf. Nothing serious. Barely gave him a limp. Half an hour later, he was stumbling all over the place and then puking up his guts. When the team plugged him into the medkit, the readings for arsenic, mercury, and lead in his bloodstream were off the charts.
- Sounder

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
4	6	3	1	6	2	4	5	3	6

Initiative	9 + 2D6
Movement	x3/x5/+5
Condition Monitor	8/11
Limits	Physical 5, Mental 5, Social 8
Armor	6H
Skills	Exotic Ranged Weapon (Feathers) 5, Flight 6, Perception 8, Unarmed Combat 6
Powers	Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Low-Light Vision), Hardened Armor (6), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV 5P, AP –2), Natural Weapon (Razor Feathers: DV 8P, AP –4, venom), Venom (Vector: Contact, Injection, Speed: Instant, Penetration: –6, Power: 8, Effect: Agony, Nausea, Disorientation, Stun Damage)
Weaknesses	Fragile (2)

KILLDEER

ODOCOILEUS PRAEDOR

Terrain: Plains/Forest
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 7.7
Length/Height: 1.4 m
Mass: 122 kg

Mother Nature and buried radioactive material are often at odds, and such is the tale of the killdeer, a mutant variation of Illinois' famous white-tailed deer.

One of the first nuclear reactors in the world was buried at Red Gate Woods in the southwest suburbs of Chi-

cago. While all the attention was on the CZ and the bug spirits inhabiting the city's inhabitants, outside of the CZ life went on, but not the same as before. The loss of so much territory and the fear of the bug spirits drove people away in droves, leaving large areas of the suburbs empty and in the hands of Mother Nature.

Deer populations rose quickly, and while introducing a predatory species or allowing the population to die off naturally have always had far better results, conservationists thought they had a good way to bring the population under control. They allowed increased hunting of the local white tails, with no limit. Sport hunters came out by the hundreds and left the forest preserves riddled with deer corpses.

There were a few instances where hunters claimed they were attacked by deer, but alcohol or drugs were often involved as well. This was the first hint of the existence of the killdeer.

My research shows the killdeer had been present in predatory numbers since the late '30s and possibly before, but pre-Crash records are tough to find. They look almost identical to a muscular white-tail buck. Only identifying a jaw variation with teeth resembling those of a wolf or coyote or noticing the sharpness of the antlers could distinguish a killdeer from a standard white-tail.

Now what happens when you litter a place with food for a predatory species. They feed and breed. Soon the killdeer population started to rise. This simply looked to conservationists like a balancing of the population. Joke was on them!

Killdeer have now expanded their territory to match their appetites and pushed out of traditional white-tail deer habitats across the plains into the NAN, south into the CAS, and east across the UCAS. While they began as a radioactivity-induced mutation, they now breed pure and eat anything they can kill.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
5	4	5	5	1	1	3	4	2	6

Initiative	10 + 2D6
Movement	x2/x5/+4
Condition Monitor	14/9
Limits	Physical 7, Mental 3, Social 5
Armor	4
Skills	Gymnastics 4, Impersonation 4, Perception 8, Running 6, Unarmed Combat 8
Powers	Armor (4), Enhanced Senses (Hearing), Immunity (Toxins), Natural Weapon (Antlers: DV 9P, AP –2), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV 10P, AP –3), Toughness (3)
Note	–1 Reach (Bite), +1 Reach (Antlers)

KOKORO COBRA

OPHIOPHAGUS KOKORO

Terrain: Jungle
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Nocturnal
Aggro Index: 8.9
Length/Height: 5.8 m
Mass: 45 kg

Named for the doctor who first discovered them and died prior to his initial studies being published, the kokoro cobra is distinct for its tolerance of irradiated environments and the extreme toxicity of its irradiated venom, which it can both inject and project. I quickly took up the studies of Dr. Kokoro after I received a letter from her discussing the potential use of the cobra's venom as a targeted cancer-fighting agent. With the recent issues we've been having with nanotech, the topic of cancer treatment has become a popular research focus. Chemotreatments like this have the potential of being effective and focused.

My studies were hampered by the environment the kokoro calls home. They were initially discovered near Mascabe City, where the former Mascabe Energy research facility was located that shut down just after the first crash back in '29. The area faced numerous fallout events, including an increase in cancer, just after the Crash, but no one has investigated the events to connect them to the research facility. With the rise of the kokoro in the area, I'm sure the Mascabe Energy facility had more than just research activities happening down there, and the radioactive leakage has modified the king cobra into the kokoro cobra, which has taken over as the predominant species on the island. The creature's potent venom, which has been in use for years by local tribes and security companies without research into what makes it so potent, has been slipping out onto the black market. Additionally, specimens of the kokoro have been captured for milking. Captive subjects produce less and less effective venom over time as the amount of radiation in their tissues decreases.

The extreme toxicity of the venom is caused, in large part, by the venom's storage of radioactive particles from the host's body tissue. The regular body tissue of the kokoro cobra has a very small level of radiation compared to its venom. With more research, I hope to discover how the creature stores the radiation in the venom and extracts it from tissue, but for that I'll need more time and more specimens.

- Renraku pays a pretty nuyen for kokoro specimens. Contact Ecotar in Tarlac City.
- Fianchetto

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
11	8	9	5	6	2	6	2	2	6	6

Initiative	15 + 3D6
Movement	x1/x4/+1
Condition Monitor	14/11
Limits	Physical 10, Mental 6, Social 5
Armor	8
Skills	Exotic Ranged Weapon (Spit) 6, Perception 8, Sneaking 6, Unarmed Combat 8
Powers	Armor (8), Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Smell, Motion Detection, Thermosense), Immunity (Toxins), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV 8P, AP –6), Substance Extrusion (Spit), Venom (Vector: Contact, Injection, Speed: Instant, Penetration: –6, Power: 12, Effect: Agony, Nausea, Disorientation, Physical Damage)
Weaknesses	Vulnerability (Cold)
Note	+1 Reach

MONTAUK

PROCYON LATRI GEMINUS

Terrain: Urban/Forest
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Nocturnal
Aggro Index: 7.8
Length/Height: 1.1m
Mass: 19.6 kg

The Montauk Monster can be best described as a creature with the body of a raccoon and the mind of a sociopath. It was first sighted in Montauk, New York in 2032, and the location provided its name. Since then, the montauk has been spotted along the northeast coast. The southernmost sighting took place near Norfolk, while Boston is the northernmost. Authorities have found that these creatures have been invading homes in the middle of the night, scaling buildings and opening doors.

So far their target has been the family pet. With each sighting, scores of pets have gone missing.

- Even guard dogs have gone missing. I've heard of pit bulls and Dalmatians taken and eaten by the montauk without much of a fight.
- G-Nome

Montauk have been recorded, leading small packs of animals down alleyways. The animals don't seem to show any fear of the montauk, nor it of them. The montauk is approximately one meter in length with short black fur, and it weighs between fifteen and twenty kilograms. The rounded ears and tail are nearly hairless, and its muzzle ends more like a beak with leathery skin covering rows of sharp teeth. Its hands have fully opposable thumbs, allowing it to operate many of the items in its urban environment. Information gathered from autopsies have led researchers to believe that it is related to the Awakened bandit, though more physically disturbing. Autopsies also show that the montauk has venom sacks that feed both its upper and lower incisors.

- New York sells plush versions of the montauk, like its some official city mascot. Twenty nuyen a pop.
- Pistons

- In the middle of the Boston chaos, I bet that there have been—and will be—unexplained disappearances of children. This monster is opportunistic.
- Plan 9

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
2	4	3	3	3	5	3	3	2	6	4

Initiative	6 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x8/+4
Condition Monitor	9/10
Limits	Physical 3, Mental 6, Social 5
Armor	4
Skills	Athletics skill group 4, Locksmith 3, Palming 6, Perception 6, Sneaking 5, Unarmed Combat 3
Powers	Accident, Animal Control, Armor (4), Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Low-Light Vision, Smell), Natural Weapon (Claws/Bite: DV 4P, AP —), Venom (Vector: Injection, Speed: 1 Combat Turn, Penetration: 0, Power: 6, Effect: Malaise, Physical Damage)
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Mild)

NEOGARGOYLE

MYOTIS LUCIFUGUS CALCIDAE

Terrain: Urban
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Nocturnal
Aggro Index: 8.7
Length/Height: 0.12 m (0.32 m wingspan)
Mass:.014 - 4 kg

The neogargoyle is another creature affected by man's urban progress. Various species of bats, who have attempted to live in metahuman towers and skyrakers, have been afflicted by a mutation.

- The mutation is caused by a reaction to the chemicals used in treating the plascrete, but no one's allowing that to show up on the trid. God forbid they check if it's bad for people living in the buildings.
- Ecotope

The roosting bats start developing calcium deposits, much like a troll, but these are cancerous lesions, which continue to grow and cover the bat's entire body. Within six months of the initial forming of the calcium deposits, the bat loses the ability to fly. In another two months, the membrane of its wings dry and tear, while the fingers gain muscle mass. At this time, the neogargoyle is basically trapped on the building and must go inside to survive. These elongated claws allow the neogargoyle to break through sheetrock and into ventilation shafts. Once inside, they scrounge for food and water. Between eight and twelve months, the neogargoyle lose eyesight and mobility as the calcification increases. They become desperate and dangerous. They will chew through cables, break pipes, even attack drones, trying to get at food. At this stage, the dermal deposits make them fairly heavy (generally two to four kilograms, though there are rumors of larger specimens) and being blind and starving, they can fall off buildings, into fans, or trigger security measures. Usually death by these actions will come before the creature becomes completely immobilized.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
1	3	2	1	1	3	3	3	3	6

Initiative	5 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x3/+2 (x2/x4/+4 Flying)
Condition Monitor	6/9
Limits	Physical 2, Mental 4, Social 5
Armor	6
Skills	Climbing 3, Flight 4, Perception 4, Sneaking 4, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Armor (6), Enhanced Senses (Echolocation, Smell), Gestalt Consciousness, Natural Weapon (Claws/Bite: DV 3P, AP —)
Weaknesses	Fragile (3), Reduced Senses (Sight)
Notes	Their Armor increases over time. For each month after the start of their mutation, they gain 1 Armor. At 12 months they have Armor (12) but are almost completely unable to move.

PANDAMONIUM

AILUROPODA TOXIS

Terrain: Forest
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 9.9
Length/Height: 2.2 m
Mass: 200 kg

It was a dark day when I discovered the existence of the pandamonium. My childhood memories of waiting in anticipation as the programs to save the endangered animal played out and the iconic black and white bear fell almost into extinction only to be saved by a fledgling Wuxing as one of the best public relations maneuvers of the early twenty-first century. Shoot forward almost fifty years and I'm hiking through one of the Chinese states—I won't mention which one—enjoying the local wildlife, when I come across the grisly remains of a hundred or so dead monkeys. The location was obviously a den of some kind, so I decided to find myself a nice hide-and-wait spot to see what predator was in the area.

I at first thought I had dozed off, because one second there was nothing, and the next I saw a panda moving along right into the middle of the monkey boneyard. Again, because I was tired, I figured I couldn't be estimating the size right because this would have been the biggest panda I had ever seen. I was looking at it from above and behind and considered giving the tree a little shake to chase him off before the monkey slayer arrived, when I heard it drop something and walk a few more steps. Lo and behold, there was a fresh monkey carcass. This was shocking enough, but then I heard something else moving loudly through the foliage nearby. I caught the sound of talking and realized it was another group of "tourists" in the region. The pandamonium must have heard as well because it turned toward the sound and rushed off into the underbrush, though not before revealing yet another amazing trick. The thing's fur pattern shifted like a bandersnatch, blending into its surroundings like it was using high-end ruthenium, and it started rushing through the underbrush toward the noise.

The next thing I heard was the group suddenly getting really quiet, followed by screams, then gunfire, then more screams, more gunfire, and finally back to the peaceful silence of the forest with only a few birds screeching as they flew off in fear. I was left stuck in the tree waiting to see what was going to happen when the underbrush rustled and the big black-and-white nightmare dragged an ork back to his monkey graveyard. After it dropped off the ork, it went back for a pair of humans, an elf, and a dwarf. All of them were obviously runners, and this thing ripped them apart in less than thirty seconds.

To add to my nightmares, the adorable demon sat down below me and started to eat. While it was eating, the standard pattern of the panda disappeared, leaving pale skin covered in dry blood. The hairs went transparent and showed the blood and gore that was the true appearance of this nightmare panda.

- Around comet time. Area of China known for mining. Any chance you were "touring" for orichalcum?
- Magister

- I was actually out looking for SURGED animals. I thought the pandamonium was one at first, but I have since been working on a hypothesis that puts the creature in the mutant/toxic category, as I believe their condition is a result of washout and contamination from the uranium mines in the region.
- G-Nome

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
6	4	5	6	3	1	5	4	2	6

Initiative	9 + 2D6
Movement	x2/x4/+1
Condition Monitor	14/10
Limits	Physical 9, Mental 4, Social 6
Armor	8
Skills	Perception 6, Running 4, Sneaking 5, Tracking 6, Unarmed Combat 6
Powers	Adaptive Coloration, Armor (8), Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Low-Light Vision, Smell), Immunity (Pathogens, Radiation, Toxins), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV 10P, AP –2), Toughness (3)
Note	+1 Reach

RADHOUND

CANIS RADIUM

Terrain: Urban (high radiation levels)
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 1.2–9.2 (high rad-no rad)
Length/Height: 0.3–1.6 m
Mass: 2.6–100 kg

The radhound is like the ultimate epitaph for man's relationship with the world—man's best friend corrupted by man's hubris and ignorance. The radhound isn't any specific breed of dog, though street mutts were the most common in the Glow City region of Seattle where I studied them. I also found that the conditions for survival as a radhound require a high radiation count, but the creation of a radhound is actually viral in nature.

Radhounds are a result of a mutated strain of the rabies virus that stabilizes in the presence of radiation. The lower the radiation, the more aggressive and rabid the radhounds behave, but in high-radiation areas they are remarkably friendly and near sapient. Problem is, the radiation in those areas can only be tolerated for a very

short period of time, with long breaks to cleanse the system in between. The viral strain theory was tested and proven using four other high-radiation locations that I know of, and potentially several other sites. The virus was able to escape the research study and now exists within several populations around the world.

Due do the effects of radiation on living tissue, the radhounds constantly look like their flesh is peeling away. Beneath this outer layer of decay, the radhound is constantly regenerating new tissue.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
6	4 (8)	5	4 (7)	3 (1)	2 (1)	6 (3)	4 (3)	3	6	6

Initiative	11+2D6
Movement	x2/x8/+4
Condition Monitor	11/10
Limits	Physical 7(9), Mental 5(2), Social 6(5)
Armor	4
Skills	Gymnastics 5, Intimidation 4, Perception 8 (Smell +2), Running 6, Tracking 6, Unarmed Combat 8
Powers	Armor (4), Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Low-Light Vision, Smell), Immunity (Pathogens), Mutagen, Natural Weapon (Claws: DV 6(9)P, AP –1), Regeneration
Weaknesses	Dietary Requirement (Radiation)
Note	Attributes in parenthesis are when the Mutagen Power is activated.

RAZORCAT

FELIS RAZOR

Terrain: Forest/Urban
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Nocturnal
Aggro Index: 8.9
Length/Height: 0.35–3.8 m
Mass: 1.1–396 kg

The razorcat specimens I have researched are all irradiated specimens whose origins I tracked back to the Isabelle Reid Home for Wayward Cats. While it sounds cute, the place was actually a cat refuge for everything from unwanted kittens to former circus tigers. It was located in the Redmond suburb of Seattle, an area we now refer to as Glow City. The various species that were at the facility were all exposed to massive doses of radiation that turned them into super predators.

Even the smallest of the cats are lightning fast and able to take down prey far larger than themselves with razor-sharp claws, needle-like teeth, and a debilitating aura of radiation. The larger specimens could easily bring down a troll. I've encountered five house cats, a lynx, a puma, and a leopard, along with rumors of a tiger and a lion.

While I've gathered solid data on eight different subjects, I am in need of more information to guide further research into the rumored subjects and others we have yet to encounter. The job is mostly information recovery, but the recovery site is in the heart of the territory the razorcats call home. I'm looking for information on the original population of the facility.

- This isn't the only place to find these. I know several have been live captured and moved to other sites. In several locations, they were released in order to monitor and test their survival in the wild. Several other locations use them as security for remote sites.
- Hard Exit

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
7 (4)	6 (5)	8	6 (2)	4 (3)	2	6 (5)	5 (4)	6 (9)	6	6

Initiative	14 (12) + 4D6
Movement	x2/x6/+4
Condition Monitor	14 (12)/10
Limits	Physical 9 (6), Mental 5 (4), Social 7 (6)
Armor	6 (4)
Skills	Gymnastics 8, Intimidation 5 (4), Perception 6, Running 5, Sneaking 6, Tracking 4, Unarmed Combat 8(5)
Powers	Armor (6 (4)), Energy Aura (Radiation), Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Low-Light Vision, Smell), Immunity (Toxins), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV 10 (6)P, AP –1), Toughness (2)
Note	+1 Reach.

SEA LEECH

CALIFORNIDAE SANGRACHIMERA

Terrain: Coastal shallows/Wetlands
Diet: Hemovore
Activity: All
Aggro Index: 9.5
Length/Height: 10.2 m
Mass: 1,000 kg

The mother of all mutations, the West Coast sea leech has been terrorizing ships and sailors for years. Such creatures can be the size of a giant squid or larger. Apart from a monstrous, worm-like body and a scary-looking lamprey mouth, no two see leeches look alike.

- Kinda like snowflakes … that can kill.
- Slamm-0!

The average size of an adult is three meters wide and ten meters long. Surrounding its mouth can be tentacles, arms, spikes, or nothing at all. Some even have fins to move faster in the water or hooked legs to drag itself on land. This makes the sea leech unpredictable. Their color ranges from grey to brown and often is mottled for camouflage.

- I've seen a sea leech with ten mouths like a hydra during the twins' quake. It decimated a whole refugee camp in twenty minutes. With no survivors, we just dropped depth charges hoping it died painfully
- Sounder

The problem with the sea leech is that the various possible multiple mutations make its behavior remarkably unpredictable. Most often, it will seek prey in the water. It can sense blood in the water over a mile away like a shark and home in on the prey. It may use confusion on the prey to disorient it. It can use its appendages to drown its prey or to pull it toward its mouth. It can latch onto a victim with its muscular mouth, then use a rasping tongue and/or teeth to consume its prey.

The sea leech is hermaphroditic and lays up to a dozen eggs (spheres up to one-third of a meter in diameter) in sediment. Sea leech offspring are about a meter in length at hatching, and they attack smaller prey such as fish and seabirds.

- Even the little ones can be dangerous. They aren't limited to the ocean; they can swim up brackish streams or sewers to find prey.
- Kane

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
7	3	2	6	1	3	4	3	4	6	6

Initiative	6 + 2D6
Movement	x2/x3/+2 (x3/x8/+4 Swimming)
Condition Monitor	11/9
Limits	Physical 12, Mental 4, Social 5
Armor	5
Skills	Escape Artist 4, Perception 4, Swimming 5, Unarmed Combat 6 (Grapple +2)
Powers	Armor (4), Confusion, Enhanced Senses (Thermal Touch), Essence Drain (Blood), Gills, Mutagen, Natural Weapon (Bite: DV 11P, AP –2)
Weaknesses	Allergy (Fire, Moderate), Reduced Senses (Vision)
Note	+1 Reach

SHARDIK

URSUS PIASMA SHARDIK

Terrain: Forest
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Nocturnal
Aggro Index: 10.0
Length/Height: 4.2 m
Mass: 1,200 kg

One of the most feared and intimidating creatures of the Sixth World is the piasma, so for the shardik to evolve as a bigger, meaner, faster, and more aggressive subspecies thanks to the environmental damage in the Algonquin Manitou Council is just bad news for anything inside the region where it hunts. I did almost all of my research on the shardik from the comfort of a Liv-A-Box™ under an LZP-2070, and I could tell they were trying to

figure out a way to get me out of the sky or catch me while I was on the ground.

The shardik is physically similar to the piasma but double the size. The fur of the shardik usually has an oily sheen, a metallic cast, or a greenish hue depending on the location of its den and its primary hunting grounds. The variations in appearance are caused by the toxic condition of their primary environment. All shardiks also have tough, dense hides beneath their fur and dermal deposits, not unlike those of a troll.

- What, no radar dish on their head?
- Thorn

Because these bears are so large, they require a sizable hunting area and display movement rates well outside the natural range for animals of their size and mass. This speed, combined with the extremely aggressive nature of the shardik, make it a creature you do not want to run afoul of under any circumstances.

The shardik will attack anything they think might be food while out on the hunt. This range includes anything that moves, makes sound, or varies in body temperature from the background. The creatures definitely have thermal sensitive vision and utilize it well in both their nocturnal hunts and within their cavernous dens. The dens that I have seen and spent small amounts of time exploring were a former mine, a natural cavern, and even a subterranean corporate complex that had been abandoned when MCT departed the AMC. My time was always short because the shardik rarely spend a day cycle outside their den. They venture out each night at dusk and return near sunrise.

Observations I've made show this aversion to sunlight to be more behavioral than biological, but these things are tough and could probably shrug off a little sunburn from getting in late. Speaking of getting in late—if a shardik is on its way back to its den at the end of the night, don't get in the way. Shardiks out hunting will only kill the food they need to survive. Shardiks on their way back in a hurry will kill everything in their path if it might slow them down.

- The twisting of the piasma was not a natural phenomenon.
- Ecotope

- I came across one of these near the coast and it attacked my skraacha. I got clear but when I checked the damage it was worse than expected, mostly because of the acid it left behind when it took a bite out of my hull.
- Turbo Bunny

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
18	8	6	14	6	4	6	5	4	6	6

Initiative	12 + 2D6
Movement	x1/x3/+3
Condition Monitor	19/11
Limits	Physical 17, Mental 7, Social 8
Armor	16
Skills	Intimidation 8, Perception 8, Running 4, Sneaking 4, Tracking 6, Unarmed Combat 8
Powers	Armor (16), Enhanced Senses (Thermographic Vision, Wide-Band Hearing), Fear, Movement (Self), Natural Weapon (Claws/Bite: DV 16P, AP –4), Paralyzing Howl, Toughness (3)
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Severe)
Note	+2 Reach

SPARK SALMON

ONCORHYNCHUS ELECTRUM

Terrain: Oceans/Freshwater Rivers
Diet: Carnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 4.5
Length/Height: 1.4m
Mass: 18.4kg

I grew up in the Pacific Northwest, and salmon has long been my absolute favorite fish. That is, until one day I was out doing some fishing (catch, study, tag, and release) and reeled in a unique catch. As I fought, I noticed a color variation that I had not identified before, an iridescent blue-green that reflected the light so brilliantly it almost made the fish look like it was glowing. It was a tough fight, and as the sun faded and I pulled it closer, I realized it was glowing, but the curious biologist in me wouldn't let it go. There are a lot of reasons for bioluminescence that don't involve radioactivity.

When I reeled it all the way in and tossed it over into a portable pool I use for short-term holding, I finally got a good look. Primarily green with a jagged blue line of scales along both sides, heavily muscled, and glowing. It took a few moments for the glowing to register, and when I checked my geiger counter it started clicking at a steady pace. I had a little time to study, so I took mass and length data.

I was at it for a good ten minutes when the salmon started becoming lethargic. Concerned for its health, I stepped on the side of the pool to release it back into the waters just as it decided to free itself by discharging an electric pulse that knocked me flat and fried my electronics.

Further study has shown the pulse to be in the 150 milliamp range, enough to kill. In saltwater the spark salmon can do this repeatedly by recharging its internal "battery" with ions from the water. In fresh water it can store only one charge and requires hours to replenish the proper charge in a non-saline environment. Alongside the electrical pulse is an electromagnetic pulse

(EMP), the part that fried my electronics, which is caused by the electrical discharge exciting the massive collection of radioactive particles within the spark salmon.

- This isn't limited to salmon. I've seen other fish pull off the same trick. Tuna pack a helluva punch.
- Kane

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
3	4	4	4	2	1	5	2	2	6	6

Initiative	10 + 2D6
Movement	x1/x4/+3 Swimming
Condition Monitor	10/9
Limits	Physical 5, Mental 3, Social 4
Armor	0
Skills	Exotic Ranged Weapon (Electricity) 4, Perception 5, Sneaking 4, Swimming 6, Unarmed Combat 6
Powers	Elemental Attack (Electricity), Enhanced Senses (Smell), Immunity (Toxins, Electricity)
Weaknesses	Vulnerability (Fire, Cold)
Note	Elemental Attack requires 1 hour to recharge in fresh water.

SPIDERMOOSE

ALCES ARACHNES

Terrain: Forest
Diet: Omnivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 7.5
Length/Height: 2.3 m
Mass: 367 kg

After all the damage MCT did to the environment in the AMC, I went up to do some research on the effects this had on local fauna. One of the most interesting discoveries of this time period was the spidermoose. It may be a very unoriginal name, but it fits the creature perfectly. Two additional pairs of legs with hooked claws on each leg and a slightly lightened bone structure allow the spidermoose to climb the twisted trees and stripped mining quarries of their corrupted home.

Along with the extra legs, the spidermoose has expanded its diet. Access to higher levels of the trees is great for additional food, but it also provides a great way to fall down on and attack unsuspecting prey. The structure of the teeth hasn't changed much, so while the spidermoose may drop down and attack prey with horns and claws, once it starts to eat, it's a strange display of tearing and gnashing of meat and bone as it crushes all of this with flat molars rather than sharp canines.

One of the other things that MCT left behind was a data-storage facility. The barren and corrupted landscape was a great natural defense, and though they ordered everything cleared on the way out, a lot of employees didn't bother to follow those orders. Some did it out of fear and just got out of the hellscape they were living in as soon as they could, while others left things behind after making a copy or checking out the data to see if it could be valuable in the future. Problem for them is the new Matrix alignment. They are either too far from the location or the coding is too different, and the site doesn't connect to the new Matrix.

- Smooth way of commenting so that others will go "research" with you.
- Mika

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
13	4	4	8	2	1	3	2	2	6	6

Initiative	7 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x5/+3
Condition Monitor	13/9
Limits	Physical 10, Mental 3, Social 4
Armor	4
Skills	Gymnastics 6, Perception 5, Running 4, Sneaking 5, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Armor (4), Binding, Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Low-Light Vision, Smell), Immunity (Toxins), Natural Weapon (Claws/Bite: DV 10P, AP –2), Substance Extrusion (Silk), Wall Walking
Note	+1 Reach

SOULEATER LEECH

HIRUDO ANIMAGLUTIAM

Terrain: Freshwater
Diet: Carnivore (?)
Activity: Any
Aggro Index: 10.0
Length/Height: 0.05m
Mass: 0.01kg

When your connection to the greater powers of the universe has a direct effect on the essential purity and integrity of your body, you become quickly aware of a problem after you encounter the souleater leech. While some folks don't believe or understand the principles of holistic integrity, they quickly become believers after a few of these latch on to their hide. A single leech does very little to damage a subject, but their effects are exponential in nature. Since they are drawn to the chemicals released as soon as one of their kind locates a suitable host, group feeding is a popular activity among them.

This species developed in the tributaries of the Amazon, where our good pals Saeder-Krupp have been dumping chemicals from their covert research facilities and power plants deep in the jungle. Exactly why this species focuses on the quintessential nature of life, rather than simple blood, makes me wonder what is being researched in some of these facilities deep in the magic-infused Amazonian basin.

- The presence of these things screams HMHVV research, but what does Lofwyr care about vampires? They're old news. The HMHVV virus is one of the most well-understood pathogens of the Sixth World. Deeper research must be going on out here. I think it's inter-dimensional travel assisted by the infusion of vampiric blood.
- Plan 9

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	6	6

Initiative	2 + 1D6
Movement	x1/x2/+0.5
Condition Monitor	1/9
Limits	Physical 2, Mental 2, Social 4
Armor	0
Skills	Perception 6, Sneaking 4, Swimming 1, Unarmed Combat 1
Powers	Enhanced Senses (Smell), Energy Drain (Essence), Immunity (Toxins), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV 1S, AP —)
Weaknesses	Allergy (Salt, Severe), Fragile (8), Reduced Senses (Sight)
Note	–2 Reach

VOID WASP

APOICA ARCAVOIDUS

Terrain: Jungle
Diet: Carnivore/Arcanivore
Activity: Diurnal
Aggro Index: 8.9
Length/Height: 0.03m
Mass: 0.001kg

There is an innate biological fear of the wasp. Something about the alien nature of its hive mind, the painful ache of their stingers, and the ferocity with which they defend their hive have made the bulk of metahumanity quiver at the faintest hint of their presence. The void wasp is no different in those aspects and adds one additional reason to be feared, though only by a small percentage of the population.

The void wasp's venom is not only extremely painful but also inhibits magical ability. It is one of the first arcanotoxins to be discovered. The nature of the toxin is difficult to study because the void wasp gains part of its toxic cocktail from its habitat. This species builds their hives near foveae (magical voids), and some portion of

that arcane absence is absorbed into the wasp's venom. Specimens that have been removed and bred in captivity have lacked the arcanotoxin, though the testing documents I discovered after turning in some specimens for study revealed the toxin still has an increased effect on those with arcane talent. Studies showed that the stronger the arcanist's magical talent, the more painful and extreme the effect of the toxin.

- How exactly did they do that research?
- Stone

- Explains some contracts I saw coming in. Snatch jobs on "powerful" mages and shamans.
- Fianchetto

The venom has a naturally created alchemical component that absorbs the nature of the foveae to create its arcanotoxic properties when developed in the wild. With the foveae factor "absorbed," it creates a mini-void that counters magical talent. When the toxin develops without a foveae present, it instead has the ability to absorb some small portion of the arcanist's natural ability, causing excruciating pain.

- This is definitely going to end up being hot for corps looking to boost their arcane defenses. A few security goons armed with dart rifles filled with some void wasp toxin would be a nightmare for a lot of teams out there.
- Sticks

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
							5	2	6	6

Initiative	16 + 2D6
Movement	x1/x3/+2
Condition Monitor	1/9
Limits	Physical 5, Mental 3, Social 6
Armor	0
Skills	Assensing 4, Flight 10, Perception 6, Running 8, Unarmed Combat 6
Powers	Dual-Natured, Energy Drain (Magic), Enhanced Senses (Motion Detection, Smell, Thermographic Vision), Fear, Natural Weapon (Stinger: DV 1S, AP –, Special), Venom (Vector: Injection, Speed: 1 minute, Penetration: –4, Power: 10, Effect: Agony, Arcane Inhibitor, Disorientation, Stun Damage)
Weaknesses	Fragile (8)
Note	Stinger attacks do nothing through armor, but the void wasp can land on a target and seek out an unarmored location. Any hit on an unarmored portion of a target or a called shot to an unarmored location injects venom.

DARKENING OF THE NIGHT

POSTED BY: HANNIBELLE

Not long ago, G-Nome put out a call asking about mutants and toxic critters. I didn't think I'd have anything to contribute; wendigos and nosferatu were toxic enough on their own, I figured, and while I won't say that mutant dzoo-noo-qua don't exist—I've been back to Texas recently, for instance, and the fabric of reality seems to be fraying around the edges just a little out in the Palo Duro Canyon—I don't have a lot of solid info on crap like that right now, for sure not enough to make it a worthwhile read.

But then I remembered some of the discussions we had putting the *Running Wild* compilation together a few years ago, and realized that while I might not be able to point him to specific mutated critters, I sure as hell had something to discuss: the mutation of the virus itself. With that in mind, I went and did a little spelunking to see if I could find something to contribute after all.

Boy howdy, do I have something to contribute.

Before I get too involved in the new stuff, though, let's start out with something familiarish. Since about '74, things have been getting harder on the Infected. Something happened, and those of us with HMHVV have been feeling the effects ever since. I won't bore you with the gory details again; you can look all that up if you want. I hadn't thought of what effects those changes were having on critters that weren't Infected, *per se,* but still had the virus to deal with.

What, I began to wonder, was going on with my favorite man-made nightmare, the chupacabra? Well, sit back and let me tell you all about them.

For those who haven't had the pleasure: What do you get when you take a largish lizard and cross it with a smallish ape? I'll give you a hint: It's scaly *and* furry. Got that pleasant image in your head? Okay. Now, take that, and then give it a mouthful of fangs and a taste for blood, and then turn it loose in the forests of the Carib League, where it can feed at will upon a variety of local fauna, up to and including the metahuman populace. That's a chupacabra. Cute little varmint, yeah?

Here's the deal: This thing was *manufactured.* When I said to cross a lizard with an ape, I was serious. Someone took genetic material from iguanas and mandrills, and then spliced in HMHVV. While they live and breed in the Carib League and much of the CAS, they appear to have originated in Madagascar, because they're all over the place there, too, apparently (and there are some significant differences between Havana-based chupacabras and other variants of the critter). The question that keeps coming up is, "Why would anyone make such a thing in the first damn place?"

To date, we don't have any answers.

- They grow these fraggers big and strong over in Havana. Had a job out in that neck of the woods not too long ago, and we got jumped by a couple that were just plain enormous. Normal chupacabras are around the size of a dwarf, but these fraggers were closer to ork-sized. Expended a *lot* of rounds getting out of there.
- Stone

- It's possible that someone was trying to get a handle of some sort on one of the abilities typically brought on by the virus; in this case, it seems to me that they might have been trying to better understand and possibly harness the immunity to toxins and disease seen in so many of the Infected. Why you'd bother with the reptilian DNA, or leave the resulting chimera able to reproduce, is beyond me, however.
- KAM

- The virus itself might have had something to do with the ability to breed, as opposed to some whim of the scientists that created the thing. It often, but not always, renders the subject sterile, but it also adapts a very great deal.

  What I find interesting about the chupacabra is that its dietary requirement is simply blood, not the blood of a specific metaspecies, as many of the other Infected require. It can also drain life energy from just about anything: cows, goats, even politicians. Most of the Infected who do that have to drain it from a sapient being.
- Doc Fangs

- Oh, Dr. McAllister! You got your invitation after all. I hope you don't mind that I excerpted a tiny part of your address at the New Year's conference in Innsbruck for this section.
- Hannibelle

- Yes, I did; I finally figured out the editor and started poking around. No, I don't mind you using the text from Innsbruck. I *do* have some reservations about the username, however.
- Doc Fangs

- It might be a little late for that, Doctor.
- The Smiling Bandit

"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

"Yes, it's a tired platitude, but the sad fact is that, six and a half decades into the Sixth World, especially in our field, it's more true now than ever before. We've known for decades that HMHVV doesn't limit itself to our strict definitions of metahumanity; one need only look at the bandersnatch to see proof of that. While the virus seems to seek certain genetic markers, what it seems to seek

out the most is *sapience*. It wants to survive, it wants to propagate, and sapient hosts are the best vector to that end. And we all know, in spite of certain propaganda, that sapience is not limited to metahumanity.

"There have been a number of recent field studies, some of which I have taken part in, some of which I've only read in journals, that show us that the human-metahuman vampiric virus is spreading—and might be seriously misnamed in the bargain."

- Oh, I'm really not liking the sound of that.
- Butch

- What's to like? I've read some of the studies that Dr. McAllister references and put together this more-or-less updated list. The trend is, at best, disturbing even if you only count the confirmed instances of Strain 1 Infection outside (established) metahumanity. You should see some of the suspected Strain 2 cases.
- The Smiling Bandit

- Wait just a damn minute. You're saying it's affecting *fish* and *reptiles* now?
- Clockwork

- And horsies, oh my!
- Plan 9

- Technically, it's Infecting the souls of sapient creatures. Take that how you will.
- Red

- Even the most poisonous flower must root where it knows the soil.
- Man-of-Many-Names

- Or the soul.
- The Smiling Bandit

- It has precedent in nature. Viruses and other parasites adapt over time to find new hosts. Cordyceps, *cymothoa exigua,* bird flu, mad cow ... all of them found ways to cross species barriers through evolution or mutation, becoming more dangerous over time.
- KAM

- Here's what keeps me up at night: Drop bears, as a for-instance, haven't caused the ghoul apocalypse yet because, even though they carry Krieger strain, their numbers are relatively small, and their attacks fairly rare. What happens if devil rats become carriers?
- Doc Fangs

- And here I thought I'd run out of nightmares.
- Thorn

HMHVV EXPRESSIONS

STRAIN 1

- Centaurs: Chirons
- Dwarfs: Goblins
- Elves: Banshees
- Humans: Vampires
- Merrow: Nibiinaabe
- Naga: Lamia
- Orks: Wendigos
- Sasquatches: Jabberwocky
- Trolls: Dzoo-noo-qua

STRAIN 1A

- Humans: Nosferatu
- Trolls: Mutaqua

STRAIN 2

- Dwarfs: Gnawers
- Elves: Harvesters
- Humans: Loup-garous
- Orks: Grendels
- Sasquatches: Bandersnatches
- Trolls: Fomóraig

STRAIN 3

- Everybody: Ghouls

- Does that mean drop bears are sapient?
- Slamm-0!

- Never. Say. That. Again.
- Hard Exit

I can't speak for all Infected, but I know the ones I associate with used to joke about things like, "What happens when we get Infected kangaroos?" and shit like that, knowing it would never really happen. And then the rumors start dribbling in from around the world, rumors about things that we all know shouldn't exist.

A lot of them are true. The virus has mutated. It's spreading, affecting non-metahumans now.

We're not joking so much anymore.

- If I may interrupt for just a moment, I'd like to point out that while these new expressions might prefer to feed on their own kind, they're all perfectly capable of draining and Infecting *you*. A lamia can turn you into a vampire just as easily as a vampire can.
- Doc Fangs

CHIRON

We started hearing rumors of some really intense parties in Athens a couple of years ago. Raucous parties in Athens aren't really anything new, but the fatality rate at these was worth looking into ... not to mention the cause of death. The victims, every one of them, had been torn apart and eaten, more or less alive. Both the parties I looked into had been described as something between a rave and an orgy, and both had been hosted by a centaur known locally as Costas. The local constabulary went to have a word with him.

And that, as my granddaddy used to say, was when shit got real, because it turns out that not only was Costas a centaur, he was Infected with HMHVV Strain 1.

They're calling these little charmers chirons, named for a centaur from ancient myth. And I wasn't being facetious with the word "charmer;" chirons are charismatic as hell, and they know how to throw a bacchanal. Naturally, they appear to be to parties what wendigos are to cannibalism; their powers can drive crowds into an orgiastic frenzy, and the chiron can drain as much life energy as it wants during the festivities. The problem with their feasts is that chirons dine on metahuman flesh, straight from the bone. The end of the night is always grisly for someone.

- Talk about the party of the century ...
- Kat o' NineTales

- Don't know much about these guys yet, but I'm researching. I do know their eyes glow a lovely toxic shade of green or yellow when they do their thing.

  Unlike many Strain 1 Infected, chirons are more than capable of drinking alcohol; they like their wine, and lots of it, and they can't get drunk. I think I'd be wary of any raves in the Mediterranean for a while.
- Red

Chirons appear as exceptionally lean, muscular specimens with dark, lustrous hair and coats. Their hooves and nails harden and sharpen; their canine teeth likewise sharpen and are retractable.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
6	3	5	6	4	3	4	5	1	2.06	4

Initiative	9 + 2D6
Movement	x2/x5/+7
Condition Monitors	11/10
Limits	Physical 8, Mental 5, Social 5–9 (depending on Essence)
Armor	0
Skills	Close Combat skill group 3, Etiquette 4 (Tribal +2), Outdoors skill group 4, Perception 5, Running 7, Sneaking 3
Qualities	Magic Sense (p. 116, *Run Faster*)
Powers	Compulsion, Dual Natured, Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision, Thermographic Vision), Essence Drain, Infection, Influence, Immunity (Age, Pathogens, Toxins), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+1)P, AP –1, –1 Reach), Natural Weapon (Kick: DV (STR+2)P, AP –1, +1 Reach), Regeneration, Sapience
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Moderate), Dietary Requirement (Metahuman Flesh), Essence Loss, Uneducated, Vulnerability (Hydra Venom)
Note	A chiron's Immunity to Toxins does not apply to hydra venom.

CHUPACABRA

A creature of legend and nightmares, the basics of the chupacabra were discussed above. It's a reptilian biped, approximately 1.2 meters when standing upright, and weighing about forty-six kilograms. It's covered in heavy green scales, with a spiky ridge running down the center of its head and back. Its torso is covered in coarse, dark fur, its hands and feet end in rending claws, and its mouth is filled with razor-sharp teeth.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
5	4	5	4	6	2	5	1	2	2D6	*

Initiative	10 + 2D6
Movement	x3/x5/+3
Condition Monitor	11/11
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 6, Social 3–7 (depending on Essence)
Armor	3
Skills	Exotic Ranged Weapon (Spit) 6, Gymnastics 5, Perception 5, Sneaking 6, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Armor 3, Concealment (Self Only), Dual Natured, Essence Drain, Immunity (Pathogens, Toxins), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+1)P, AP –1, –1 Reach), Natural Weapon (Claws: DV (STR+1)P, AP –1), Paralyzing Touch, Venom
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Moderate), Dietary Requirement (Blood), Essence Loss, Vulnerability (Fire)
Note	The starting Magic for a chupacabra is equal to 5 or its Essence, whichever is lower.

JABBERWOCK

These appear to be the first non-metahuman Strain 1 Infected, which is fair since sasquatches were also the first non-metahuman Strain 2 Infected. Rumors of these things go as far back as 2063, when a USAS Air passenger liner fell out of the sky near Devil's Tower on Halloween. Someone finally bagged a specimen in 2076.

Jabberwocky, unlike bandersnatches, get to hang on to their intellect. Unlike sasquatches, they're dedicated hunters that can conceal themselves supernaturally. This is not a good combination if you happen to be the prey, and considering that they drink the blood of sasquatches and metahumans alike, most of us are.

The two survivors of that UCAS Air flight say that they never quite saw what was pursuing them and taking out the other survivors; they'd catch a glimpse of something just out of the corners of their eyes, stuff like that. They also described waves of paranoia and creeping dread that would crop up whenever they managed to stop and rest, which seems to indicate some sort of fear-inducing ability. It never let up until the sun started to rise, and then as abruptly as it had started, the relentless pursuit that they couldn't quite see just stopped.

- So to carry on an earlier discussion, jabberwocky prefer the "taste" of despair as their emotional bridge to drain?
- Frosty
- Looks that way. But I'm curious now. What is it that connects Lewis Carroll, sasquatches, and HMHVV?
- Red
- Your guess is as good as mine, pretty boy. Maybe better. > Hannibelle
- This won't ease anybody's mind, but they appear to be much more comfortable in urban environments than sasquatches.
- The Smiling Bandit

Jabberwocky are difficult to distinguish from their non-vampiric cousin. Their thick fur darkens to black, and the teeth are elongated and considerably sharper than normal.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
3	2	5	5	4	3	5	4	4	2D6	*

Initiative	14 + 2D6
Movement	x3/x5/+3
Condition Monitor	13/10
Limits	Physical 11, Mental 6, Social 5–8 (depending on Essence)
Armor	0
Skills	Animal Calls (Professional Knowledge) 8, Artisan 6, Assensing 6, Athletics skill group 5, Perception 6, Sneaking 8, Tracking 7, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Concealment (self only), Confusion, Dietary Requirement (metahuman blood), Dual Natured, Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Smell, Thermographic Vision), Essence Drain, Fear, Immunity (Pathogens, Toxins), Infection, Mimicry, Regeneration, Sapience
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Severe), Dietary Requirement (Metahuman Blood), Vulnerability (Plastics)
Notes	Jabberwocky can consume only blood, and they suffer nausea (p. 409, *SR5*) within an hour when they consume anything else. They have +1 Reach.

GUIDELINES FOR THE INFECTED

All Strain 1 Infected have certain traits in common. Damage taken due to their Allergy to Sunlight cannot be healed with Regeneration, even after they are no longer being exposed. Normal and magical healing still work.

Unless noted otherwise, all Infected may be adepts, magicians, or mystic adepts. They always have a Magic rating, whether they are magically active or not. The starting Magic rating for Strain 1 Infected is equal to 6 or their Essence, whichever is lower. This Magic rating does not include any Initiation ranks the NPC might have if they are magically active.

LAMIA

We don't know a lot about these, beyond that they're naga Infected with Strain 1. A specimen was recovered in Calcutta in 2076, but reports show that they may have been slithering around the jungles and sprawls of India and East Asia for years before that.

- I've been looking into these for an associate of mine; might have known they were Infected.

  Reports show that their hunting technique involves projecting a mental image of their prey's fondest desire, much like an incubus. The sense of attachment for the subject, whether this is a sexual urge fulfilled or a lost loved one reunited, seems to be their favored psychic connection.
- Red

- The reports also say that their venom is a potent paralytic with a narcotic side effect. In other words, it freezes you up and blisses you out.
- Turbo Bunny

- There's gonna be a market for that. Call 'em snakebites or something ...
- Haze

- Some reports suggest that it liquefies your flesh to make it easier for the lamia to eat you. You really want to put *that* in your body? That just seems stupid to me.
- Red

- Interesting note: The venom shows chemical similarities to chupacabra venom. Seems the virus has a hand in it, suggesting other Infected could develop it through mutation.
- The Smiling Bandit

HMHVV gives lamia a more monstrous appearance than nagas, with spikes and barbules around the snout. The creature's fangs are more pronounced, and the scales are thicker and darker-hued.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
6	7	5	6	6	3	5	5	3	2.0	*

Initiative	10 + 2D6
Movement	x3/x4/+3
Condition Monitors	11/11
Limits	Physical 9, Mental 6, Social 6–10 (depending on Essence)
Armor	10
Skills	Assensing 4, Gymnastics 3, Perception 7, Unarmed Combat 4
Qualities	Cold-Blooded (p. 120, *Run Faster*)
Powers	Armor 10, Compulsion (Lust), Desire Reflection (p. 194, *Street Grimoire*), Dual Natured, Essence Drain, Immunity (Age, Pathogens, Toxins), Infection, Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+2)P, AP –2, –1 Reach), Regeneration, Sapience, Venom
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Severe), Dietary Requirement (Metahuman Flesh), Essence Loss, Uneducated, Vulnerability (Silver)

NIBIINAABE

For those of you who thought you were safe from Infection on the high seas ... yeah, not so much. First encountered off the coast of Maine in 2075, the nibiinaabe are merrow with Strain 1. They can take you on with tremendous skill underwater. Judging by the accounts of that first encounter in '75, they also appear to be perfectly capable of leaping out of the water onto the deck of a yacht, wrapping that tail around their chosen dinner, and yanking them down into the deep blue.

- I've seen them eat flesh, but not with every attack. All the victims we've discovered have been exsanguinated, suggesting that they're actually hemovores. They appear to have enhanced sensory capabilities, particularly their hearing; they seem vulnerable to sonic attacks and exceptionally loud noises.

  In combat, they can create zones of supernatural silence and darkness; catching them by surprise would seem to be more important than usual when fighting them.
- Doc Fangs

- How do you know so much about combat techniques, Doctor? That hardly seems part of your portfolio.
- The Smiling Bandit

- I haven't spent all my time as a lab monkey, Mr. Bandit. I picked up a few things after I went back into the field, out of necessity.
- Doc Fangs

- So *that's* what was going on. I had a recovery job down in the Falklands last year. Before the dive, our native guide threw submersible drones with speakers over the side of the boat. "Protects us from the locals," he said, then he literally dropped the bass underwater and started blasting Fragging Unicorns' *Lone Star Supernova* album. Now I think I know what he was talking about.
- Sounder

- Heh. "Mr. Bandit."
- Kat o' NineTales

The nibiinaabe has more pronounced dorsal ridges than its cousin; these often end in sharp tines. Their fingers and tails are longer than a typical merrow's, and the tail is long enough to wrap around an opponent and grapple. Their hide and scales become darker, often a mottled deep gray with ashen white streaks.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
6	3	6	8	4	3	5	4	3	2(6)	*

Initiative	14 + 2D6
Movement	x3/x7/+4 (swimming)
Condition Monitors	11/10
Limits	Physical 11, Mental 5, Social 5–8 (depending on Essence)
Armor	4
Skills	Assensing 4, Gymnastics 4, Perception 5, Swimming 9, Unarmed Combat 7 (Subduing Combat +2)
Powers	Armor 4, Darkness, Dual Natured, Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Low-Light Vision, Thermographic Vision), Essence Drain, Immunity (Pathogens, Toxins), Infection, Natural Weapon (Tail: DV (STR+2)P, AP –1, +1 Reach), Regeneration, Sapience, Silence
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Moderate), Dietary Requirement (Metahuman Blood), Essence Loss, Uneducated, Vulnerability (Sonic Attacks)
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Severe), Dietary Requirement (Metahuman Flesh), Essence Loss, Uneducated, Vulnerability (Silver)

EXTRAPLANAR TRAVELERS

Magister looked down at the table. He gently caressed the quicksilver camera before picking up the photos. Each photo was a blurry creature smeared with blotches of color and light. Magister adjusted his sight to evaluate their authenticity From his commlink, he projected AR docs and wandered through them like clouds in his office. Titles like Croki, Kappa, and Preta commanded his attention for a time, with more boring graphs of demographics and partial translations of rituals. At one document, he read the name "G-Nome" and laughed to himself. He took a few minutes with each document, thinking of their authors. He almost circled the entire office until he accidentally ran into someone's foot. This brought him back to the reality that people were standing in his office, waiting for his response.

"Gentlemen, it looks like everything is in order," he said to a burly ork in a faux-leather jacket who was leaning against the wall next to a leaner human in business casual attire.

The burly ork shifted his stance to get out of Magister's way, while his partner looked uncomfortable and avoided Magister's gaze. Magister circled back to sit at his desk. He reached into a drawer and pulled out a velvet bag, dumping the sparkling diamonds. "Would this do?"

The ork's eyes grew wide and started leaning toward the pile. He glanced over to his partner who fiercely gave him a negative sign. The ork looked disappointed, then turned to Magister "Mr. Johnson, we deal in nuyen only."

Magister looked down at the diamonds, and in an odd outburst, swept them into the drawer. The ork's partner jumped. Magister calmed down quickly and pulled out a platinum credstick. He waved it over his commlink, then handed it the ork. "There. I hope that is satisfactory."

The ork checked it and nodded. "Thank you, Mr. Johnson."

Both of them hastily left the office.

After a few moments, Magister sat calmly at his desk. The ambient lighting shifted, darkened, and a brown leather book, roughly crafted with tufts of coarse black hair still attached, manifested on his desk next to the camera.

A deep gravelly voice projecting from everywhere interrupted Magister's thoughts. "I think the thin one saw me. I should kill him."

"Nonsense. You said the same thing about the cleaning maid. Now we only have twice-a-week drone service. No, no, we have more pressing needs." Magister picked up one of the quicksilver photos. "We need to find this one. I believe he can make the repairs and add the missing pages."

"As you wish." A note of spite resonated within the voice. There was a surge in the lighting and all the lights went out, leaving Magister staring out into the moonlit street, caressing the leather-bound book.

POSTED BY: MAGISTER, G-NOME

CROSSING OVER

We are in a time where we can reach almost anywhere on earth, in space, and even to different metaplanes thanks to magic. A new age of exploration is upon us, and we have found wonderful things in the astral world that we never could have imagined. But we have forgotten the principal rules of exploration. We have brought back non-indigenous life to our world, and they have proliferated. We have introduced parasites and colonizers without a second thought. While this is more of an explanation of the kinds of astral creatures entering our world, it should also be the catalyst for corporations and countries alike to establish regulation and documentation of astral entities, much like current immigration laws.

- Yeah, the literal genie is out of the bottle on this one, but I can see how the threats of the shedim and bugs are reason enough for this type of thinking.
- Haze

- G-Nome, would you care to explain why you graffitied the article I posted?
- Bull

- Because Magister is a thief!
- G-Nome

- I think that can be said for a few people here.
- Slamm-0!

- Let me clarify. Two weeks ago, someone broke into my apartment and stole my photos and my quicksilver camera, and they also hacked my work on documenting a few spirits. Imagine my surprise to find that work pirated by Magister.
- G-Nome

- Given the fact that Magister has never shied away from admitting his theft from other corporations, I guess we can give you the benefit of the doubt that some of this is your work.
- Slamm-0!

Parasites are becoming more frequent as travelers move from metaplane to metaplane. Astral gateways are left unsupervised, allowing all sorts of spirits into our astral plane. Parasites cover spirits who come here to exploit the astral environment. These spirits are akin to the

A NOTE ON CONDITION MONITORS

Condition Monitors for extraplanar critters are cumbersome collections of multiple equations and nested parentheses. In the end, they follow the basic format of (Body / 2) + 8 and (Willpower / 2) + 8, but rather than fill this chapter with variations on that equation, we did pre-calculations based on a critter of Force 4. Then all you have to do is look to see if the modifier for Body and Willpower is an even or odd number, then make the adjustments listed on the following table (note that for the purposes of the table, zero fits in with the even number modifiers):

FORCE	ADJUSTMENT FOR EVEN MODIFIERS	ADJUSTMENT FOR ODD MODIFIERS
1	–1	—
2	–1	–1
3	No change	–1
4	No change	No change
5	+1	No change
6	+1	+1
7	+2	+1
8	+2	+2
9	+3	+2
10	+3	+3
11	+4	+3
12	+4	+4

historical introduction of invasive species rather than an intelligent force establishing new operations.

Now that we are over half a century into the Sixth World, we also have metaplanar tourists and transients coming to check what the fuss is about. Others find it's another waystation to pass through. What's worse are those who come first to visit, then decide to stay. They are squatters who believe they have the right to stay. Finally, the absolute worse of the lot are those from the Seelie and Unseelie courts, who not only stay but attempt to meddle in our affairs, even subvert metahuman nations. The Seelie Court is known to have influence within Tír na nÓg, but the Unseelie Court is more mysterious—what we think we know about it is mostly rumors and anecdotes. Many people do not believe that the court is even real, thinking that it's just propaganda created by opponents of the Seelie Court (or an ongoing false flag operation by supporters). This is still debated to this day, even after my work on *Aetherology*. So while proof of the court's existence would be hard to come by, I can tell you of a few of the kind of spirits that are present there. And in other metaplanes, and in our world. Beware.

- Magister—or G-Nome—has been watching too many B-movies.
- The Smiling Bandit

ANARCH

After ny first encounter with a blackjack, my view of the world and the runners who I teamed up with was always tinged with a little extra suspicion. Knowing that there were astral visitors out there who were coming to our metaplane and meddling in our shadows, I put my extra attention toward blackjack types. I might have missed several anarchs, since these astral vacationers seem to find my ops quite often, especially since I started paying attention to them.

Anarchs bring a lot more chaos to a run than blackjacks. While blackjacks look to make precision strikes against the corporations, anarchs seem to favor a "shake the pillars of heaven" methodology. They also have a tendency to expose runners with too many corporate connections, often at the time that creates the most possible drama with the other members of the team. They're the twisted embodiment of the "pink mohawk" runner mentality.

Like the blackjacks, they're from Zecorporatum, where they take the fight to the streets and try to bring down the order of the corporations by undermining them with chaos. Their efforts do little on their home metaplane and so, like the blackjacks, they come to ours, claiming that our world is the root cause of the trouble in theirs.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F+2	F+2	F+1	F+2	F	F	F	F/2	F	F	F

Initiative	[(F x 2) +1] + 2D6
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Condition Monitor (for Force 4)	9/10
Limits	Physical (F x 4)/3, Mental (F x 4)/3, Social (F x 4)/3
Armor	*
Skills	Assensing, Automatics, Blades, Clubs, Con, Demolitions, Disguise, Forgery, Gymnastics, Impersonation, Locksmith, Palming, Perception, Pistols, Sneaking, Throwing Weapons, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Accident, Aura Masking, Banishing Resistance, Materialization, Natural Weapon (Fist: DV [Force + 2]P, AP —), Realistic Form, Sapience
Notes	*As worn

ARBOREAL

In the beginning of the Sixth World, one of the first unusual things that happened was the spontaneous growth of forests and jungles. Many assumed it was caused by druids, or perhaps it was a spontaneous spell effect. What people didn't think about was that it could have been spirits manifesting. An arboreal manifests as a tangle of vines, thorns, and leaves that hangs suspended for many meters between trees, feeling and listening to the patterns of its forest or jungle home.

Arboreals are hard to understand, as they have only the most basic visual and verbal cues that metahumans can interpret. No one truly understands their motivations, which often leads to conflict.

- People often mistake their "want to shake your hand" move with "going to strangle you," often with deadly results
- Slamm-0!

The only organization to establish anything like an alliance with the arboreals is the Primeira Vaga. Under their influence, the arboreals are environmental terrorists who chew through a city's infrastructure, animating trees and plants like a slow-moving army.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F+2	F	F	F+1	F	F	F	F	F	F-2	F

Initiative	(F x 2) + 2D6
Astral Initiative	(F x 2) + 3D6
Condition Monitor (for Force 4)	11/10
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Armor	0
Skills	Assensing, Astral Combat, Close Combat skill group, Exotic Ranged Weapon (Thorns), Perception
Powers	Astral Form, Aura Masking, Banishing Resistance, Compulsion, Engulf, Fear, Materialization, Natural Weapon (Thorns: DV (Force + 2)P, AP —), Possession, Regeneration, Sapience, Spirit Pact
Optional Powers	Guard

BLACKJACK

My first encounter with a blackjack was during a run against MCT. The blackjack wasn't part of MCT's security, though—it was one of the runners on the team. I was brought in to help them deal with the barghests that MCT had patrolling the perimeter, and Jack (that was the name the blackjack went by) was muscle. He was fast, and when I first assensed him, I got a mundane aura and didn't pick up any wires, so I figured he was an adept with some serious talent. Which is always good to have on your side. He wasn't all zen, like most of the adepts I know, though. He played the calm professional, always ready for the fight, always in the right gear, and always keen on making sure MCT paid for what it had done. While runners talking about extracting revenge from a corp don't usually put me on edge, something about him did.

When we hit the place, Jack was a consummate pro. He neutralized guards non-lethally, made sure to avoid collateral damage in terms of staff on site, and made all the classic moves that a precision runner would make. Then, when it was time to get out, he broke off from the team. We called him back and warned him we'd leave without him, and he came back with a calm, "That's what I'd do. Get rolling." Our rigger kept tabs on the building while we left and sent a feed to all of us that we couldn't believe. It was a view of Jack in one of the upper floor penthouses, and by upper floor I mean 87th floor. This was under a minute since he'd broken off. No way he could have covered that distance and bypassed security so quickly, but there he was, standing over the sleeping form of some MCT exec. Then he reached down and lifted the exec up out of the bed with one hand, and we watched as the exec's body blanched white and went limp. Jack dropped the body, looked right at the camera, and vanished.

Curiosity piqued.

Jack was just one of many blackjacks that have started to visit our plane. I've met a few since and they aren't very talkative. From what I've gathered, they are an embodiment of the shadowrunner spirit, the "black trenchcoat" variety that always feels the need to be professional and treat running as a business, but they always have some other agenda when they're here. A target of some kind. It's not always an executive or even a person. Sometimes it's data, and they get some help from a hacker. Sometimes it's just to leave a message. A little way of saying, "Hey, your security can be breached." They always use regular means, though. They get in with a runner team. They don't just pull a spirit Houdini move and pop in for the prize.

Where they're from was a mystery I didn't wait long to solve. Especially after I discovered their fellow astral vacationers, the anarchs and stabbers. All three originate from a metaplane I call Zecorporatum. The place is an urban landscape much like many of ours, filled with seemingly mindless workers toiling away at jobs to make the place run for pseudo-corporations with disturbingly familiar names like Mars Macrotechnology, AzCorp, Mitsudaishi Corporate Technologies, and more. There is one for each of our Big Ten. It's obviously a metaphor for our world, but twisted and rather surreal.

This is where the few rare blackjacks, anarchs, and stabbers that arise come in. They journey to our metaplane to fight the megacorporations that have apparently created this twisted mirror of our own world. The problem is, they don't think of our world as real. Rather, they consider it to be a shadow realm of their home. While they seem understandable because they sometimes act in ways with which we are familiar, they still have a mentality that is truly alien to ours.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F+2	F+1	F+1	F	F	F	F	F	F/2	F	F

Initiative	[(F x 2) + 1] + 3D6
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Condition Monitor (for Force 4)	11/10
Limits	Physical (F x 4)/3, Mental (F x 4)/3, Social (F x 4)/3
Armor	*
Skills	Assensing, Automatics, Blades, Clubs, Computer, First Aid, Gymnastics, Intimidation, Locksmith, Longarms, Perception, Pilot Ground Craft, Pistols, Sneaking, Throwing Weapons, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Aura Masking, Banishing Resistance, Guard, Natural Weapon (Fist: DV F+2 AP —), Realistic Form, Sapience
Notes	*As worn

BOGGLE

While there are spirits who go for violence, chaos, and mass destruction, boggles enjoy the small things of entropy and decay. Metahumans might think this is tied to a hatred of living beings like the shedim have, but this is far from the truth. Boggles are simply fascinated by these processes. They will watch mold grow or listen to termites eat through a fence. The destruction of bigger things through their hobby is just an afterthought—and also the reason why more powerful and/or evil spirits keep them around.

- Put a boggle under a bridge and watch it collapse after a few months. Put it in the sewers, and before long pipes will burst and sinkholes will form. Forget about allowing them near a power plant!
- Ethernaut

Boggles can't hide their presence for very long. Their homes are influenced by their aura, always require maintenance, and are plagued with rust, mold, and devices that are unreliable. This is how they like it. Once the place collapses, they'll move on to someplace new. Boggles can be attracted to a place if trash hasn't been picked

up in a while and food starts to spoil. Their favorite dish is chòu dòufu, so odds are you can find a boggle or two dining on the stinky tofu in an Asian marketplace. Many would presume that boggles are ugly sinister creatures, but they are, in fact, rather pleasant in appearance. Boggles appear as pretty pixies, but they grow small thorns along their arms and legs, and their head is wreathed in a crowning ring of thorns that tangles their hair.

- Getting rid of a boggle from your house may be a challenge, even if you clean the place, as their powers just cause new problems. The mundane and expensive way to get rid of them is to find durian fruit and create a trail out of your house, leading them to become somebody else's problem.
- G-Nome

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F-2	F-1	F-1	F-2	F+2	F	F	F	F/2	F	F

Initiative	[(F x 2) – 1] + 2D6
Astral Initiative	(F x 2) + 3D6
Condition Monitor (for Force 4)	9/11
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Armor	0
Skills	Assensing, Astral Combat, Close Combat skill group, Gymnastics, Perception
Powers	Astral Form, Aura Masking, Banishing Resistance, Entropic Aura, Flight, Materialization, Natural Weapon (Thorns: DV (Force + 2)P, AP —), Sapience

BUGUL

Bugul are ugly, toad-shaped creatures with a large, prominent nose that takes up much of their face. They are cousins to leprechauns, but you can hardly tell by their looks. Odd enough for fae, they hate magic. Or rather, the manipulation of elements and illusions irritate them to no end. They believe in a structured and static world. This hatred manifests in a resistance to magic. Combined with high intellect and love of rules, this makes them ideal arbitrators and lawyers. Many types of spirits and fae dislike the bugul, as they cannot be magically influenced or even magically assassinated—unless you're especially skilled and dedicated

- Tír na nÓg still has stewards for metahuman disputes. When it starts getting complex like adding spirit involvement, then a bugul might be retained.
- Ethernaut

- Some court systems will allow a bugul, but it's on the client's head to supply any payment required.
- Haze
- Can they stop the Wild Hunt? Sure, but the bugul are like lawful neutral—if you're being legally chased, they won't stop them.
- G-Nome

While I said they love rules, I meant they are obsessed with laws and will obey them to the letter. They won't cross the street unless the light tells them to. On the flip side, if they have a goal in mind, they will purposefully work through all the red tape. So after the days or weeks they took to perform research and obtain the needed permits, no one can tell them they can't do what they want to do—legally speaking, at least.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F	F-1	F-1	F-2	F+1	F+2	F	F	F/2	F	F

Initiative	[(F x 2) – 1] + 2D6
Astral Initiative	(F x 2) + 3D6
Condition Monitor (for Force 4)	10/11
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Armor	0
Skills	Artisan, Assensing, Astral Combat, Con, Counterspelling, Disenchanting, Gymnastics, Negotiation, Perception, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Astral Form, Aura Masking, Improved Sense (Smell, Thermal), Materialization, Sapience, Spell Resistance (4), Spirit Pact

CHINDI

The world changed with the Awakening. The shattering of the once mighty U.S.A. and the rise of the Native American Nations changed not only the political landscape of North America but also the physical landscape, and more so the mental landscape. A lot of years have passed, and while those early years held a flood of successes and growth for America's first residents, the years since have been a struggle.

The first account of a chindi encounter that I uncovered was in 2041. It was the harrowing tale of the slow road to insanity taken by Edward Davenport, a lab technician at Shiawase Atomics. The site Davenport worked at was an R&D post focused on byproduct disposal. Problem is, the location was falsifying most of their research studies in order to maintain funding, and the toxic byproducts they were in charge of were simply stored in an underground bunker. The bunker was not nearly as sound as they thought it was, and leakage from it damaged the local environment, including a small town's water supply. The chindi uncovered the truth and then chose Davenport as their target for revenge. Davenport managed to arrange removal in hopes of appeasing the astral visitor, but they decided on a sentence of death for him and abruptly carried it out.

The chindi are Native American spirits of revenge, but they aren't traditional spirits. They all come from a

metaplane I have dubbed the Hunting Grounds. The place has a very traditional Native American vibe, but some areas seem to reflect some modern concepts, while others reflect the corruption of our natural world. The occupants—beings with the looks, traditions, and languages of the various Native American tribes, often with animalistic features—live peaceful lives until the "corruptions," by which they mean the modern touches and pollution, disrupt their lives. Chindi come from places in the Hunting Grounds twisted by that corruption; they seek out paths to our metaplane, often located within those corrupted areas, further deepening their twisted state.

The physical appearance of the chindi reflects the nature of their corruption. They come to our plane with modern touches in the appearance of their clothing and physical deformities from exposure to pollutants that they cannot change once they arrive. Chindi with animalistic features are sometimes confused with changelings.

- Shamans among many of the tribes have known of the Hunting Grounds for a long time. They've traveled to speak with spirits there and seek out chindi. The number of chindi has risen drastically in recent years, especially with what MCT did to the AMC.
- Mika

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F+2	F+1	F+2	F+1	F	F	F	F	F/2	F	F

Initiative	[(F x 2) + 2] + 2D6
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Condition Monitor (for Force 4)	11/10
Limits	Physical (F x 4)/3, Mental (F x 4)/3, Social (F x 4)/3
Armor	(F x 2)H
Skills	Archery, Blades, Clubs, First Aid, Gymnastics, Intimidation, Perception, Sneaking, Throwing Weapons, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Accident, Astral Form, Aura Masking, Banishing Resistance, Elemental Attack (Electricity), Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision, Thermographic Vision), Guard, Influence, Materialization, Natural Weapon (Fist: DV (F+1)P, AP —), Realistic Form, Sapience, Search
Notes	Shamans should add Assensing, Banishing, Counterspelling, and Spellcasting skills

CORPSELIGHT

This being is likely the reason for hundreds, if not thousands, of years of legends regarding lights floating in the swamps and forests, luring people to their deaths. Before the Awakening, these lights were blamed on pockets of natural gas, but extensive study seems to indicate that corpselights were likely active during the downcycle of mana. They sustained themselves on the life force of their victims in the same manner they do now, though during the low cycle their feeding periods would have been far more frequent.

My initial research started when Patterson wasn't able to get solid information and I wanted to discover the facts for myself. I didn't find much more than anyone else early on. The corpselight is a small glowing ball with about the same brightness as a torch. It floats anywhere from a few centimeters to two meters above the ground. On rare occasions it floats higher, and a few have been spotted in trees.

When hunting, they have historically used their movement power to slow prey. This was exclusively done within their natural habitat—swamps and marshes—because it was secluded, and slow-moving, frequently lost beings were commonplace. In recent years they have expanded their hunting range to urban environments, where their movement-inhibiting powers represent wrong turns or tripping unexpectedly.

Corpselight feeding is a euphoric experience. As they drain life, they excite the pleasure centers of the brain and flood the victim's system with dopamine. Death is an unmatched pleasure.

The ball of light is eerie but not frightening. The true horror of the corpselight is only visible to those with astral sight. On the astral plane, the corpselight looks like a twenty-tentacled cephalopod that latches onto its victims and drains the life from them.

As a species (though they lack a clear taxonomy due to their astral nature), corpselights are solitary, though groups hunt together in fertile territory. Though they have previously been identified as nocturnal, extensive research indicates the creatures are in fact active during the day, but they only glow at night. During daylight hours, their presence on the physical plane resembles a small cloud of dust or particulate matter blowing in the wind.

- G-Nome, how the hell did you do this research?
- Lyran

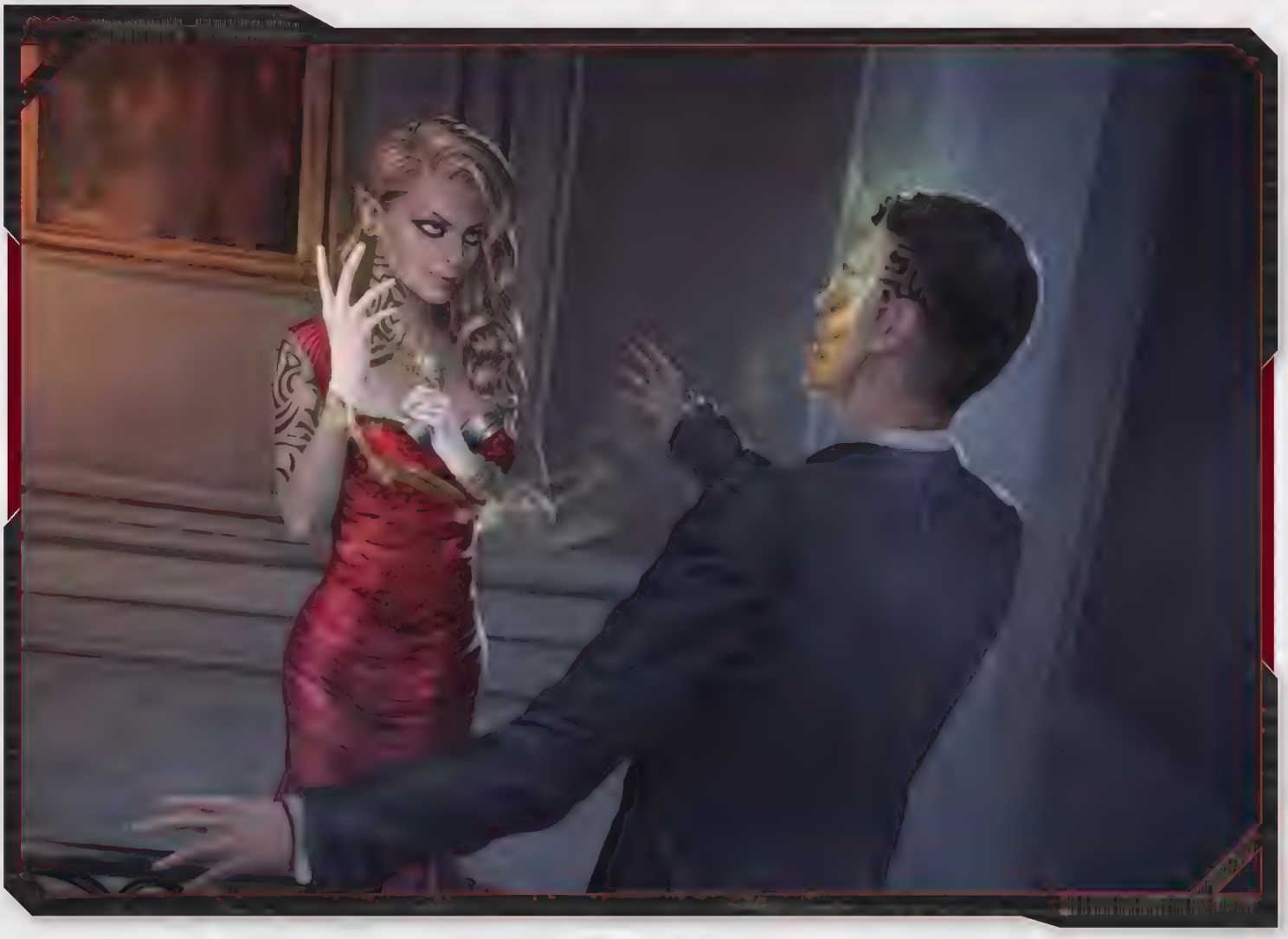
- I have my ways.
- G-Nome

- And here we have an excellent example of the pot calling the kettle black. Which corporation did you raid for this? I bet it was from early Ares work.
- Ethernaut

- Frag you!
- G-Nome

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
[illegible]			1	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	1	4	2D6	6

Initiative	15 + 4D6
Movement	x3/x6/+3
Condition Monitor (for Force 4)	11/11
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 5, Social 4
Armor	12H
Skills	Assensing 4, Counterspelling 6, Intimidation 3, Sneaking 7, Tracking 5
Powers	Essence Drain, Immunity (Normal Weapons), Manifestation, Movement, Natural Weapon (Strike: DV 9P, AP —), Psychokinesis, Regeneration
Weaknesses	Essence Loss
Notes	Reach –1. When a corpselight is encountered, it has an initial Essence Rating of 2D6. Thus, its normal maximum Essence Rating is 12. (Note, however, that its Essence Drain Power can, theoretically, increase its Essence Rating to 24.)



CROKI

The croki are beautiful fae, with an appearance more human than elf, while still retaining that attractive fae glamour. They have an artistic talent and nimble hands, and they are dexterous enough to create intricate origami art in various materials. Many are hired as interior decorators for other fae or great spirits, as some croki's magical talents can even fold the perception of space. A handy skill for the customer who wants to present a larger room without purchasing one.

Croki perceive our world as a suitable canvas, and the living within as mobile works of art. They will hire/enslave metahumans to accompany them around like a retinue. The croki may dress their servants up like dolls, or make more permanent physical alterations to show off their talent. Croki retinues can be quite the sight, with ornate tattoos, piercings, and other alterations they may be inspired to make.

- "Hire" is too weak of a word, and "enslave" is probably too strong. People dealing with spirits can negotiate contracts with them, even mundanes. Unfortunately, the contracts have a magical component, making them hard to break. People also don't read or understand what they are getting into.
- Winterhawk

One thing about croki is that they all wear white gloves. Emphasis on the "white," though the cut and material can change to fit their fashion taste. They are somewhat vain about keeping their hands clean. They don't wave or eat food without utensils—they find such practices barbaric. They also don't do handshakes unless it's to seal a deal. Another reason why they wear gloves is that its a common courtesy as their touch can easily peel skin from metahuman and fae alike. It's not that they care if they flay a metahuman, but they do follow

court protocols over messy displays. This is the darker aspect of the croki. They can manipulate their servants' skin for their art. Once flayed, the victim's skin can be crafted into various magical items. It's been suggested that a croki of great power was able to bind the Al Azif in human skin.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F	F	F+2	F+2	F	F	F	F	F	F	F

Initiative	[(F x 2) + 2] + 2D6
Astral Initiative	(F x 2) + 3D6
Condition Monitor (for Force 4)	10/10
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Armor	0
Skills	Artificing, Assensing, Astral Combat, Gymnastics, Perception, Ritual Spellcasting, Spellcasting
Powers	Astral Form, Aura Masking, Fae Glamour, Flay Touch, Fold Perception, Improved Sense (Smell, Thermal), Materialization, Sapience, Spirit Pact

DUENDE

Duende are unscrupulous gamblers. They love metahuman games of risk and chance, and they hate to play fair. They are a wild bunch—they love to drink, drive fast cars, and party all night. Or whatever passes for night on the metaplanes they happen to be on.

- That's because they aren't affected by drink or the need for sleep, and they can stop physically manifesting if it looks like they'll crash.
- Ethernaut

They can do this until dawn, then evanescence kicks in and they have to find another way back to their plane. Duende don't want to go back to the dreary fae metaplane, so they look to make deals with metahumans, and they normally do this through the preverbial pound of flesh offered at high-stakes games.

In appearance, the duende are like the humanoid caterpillar like from Alice in Wonderland. They have a long, slender torso, providing space for multiple arms. They have two sets of legs, but they can fold up the second pair so it doesn't interfere with driving a car.

- The duende own the look, going by names such as "Absolem" and "Shiva."
- Axis Mundi

Their extraplanar nature allows them to make some unusual wagers, like one of their arms or eyes. It's more than a little disturbing when they bloodlessly pop off one of their arms. Same goes for an eye. The duende will explain that the offer is to give the winner the power of that arm or eye. What many don't realize is that if they play, they are agreeing to a spirit pact if they win. The duende would have to fight against its nature to win, because if it loses, it doesn't have to disappear with sunrise.

The limb or eye wagered represents a spirit pact, with the duende offering a physical boon. This is usually solely symbolic, but if the person on the other side of the table has lost a limb or eye, this pact regenerates the missing part, but with the physical appearance of the duende.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F	F	F+2	F+2	F	F	F	F	F	F	F

Initiative	[(F x 2) + 2] + 2D6
Astral Initiative	(F x 2) + 3D6
Condition Monitor (for Force 4)	10/10
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Armor	0
Skills	Assensing, Astral Combat, Con, Gymnastics, Perception
Qualities	Shiva Arms
Powers	Astral Form, Aura Masking, Hidden Life*, Improved Sense (Touch), Materialization, Regenerate*, Sapience, Spirit Pact
Weaknesses	Evanescence
	* Only works in connection with spirit pacts.

ELVAR

Elvar are commonly found in the Seelie Court. They love to play the political games, and many have become fascinated by the complexities of the Corporate Court. Many have also found dressing in period clothes with powdered wigs inspirational in doing business with metahumans, though that look doesn't always fly in the Corporate Court.

- Snuff is another thing they like. They shove all kinds of things up their nose to make themselves sneeze. Doesn't have any other effect.
- G-Nome

There are a dozen houses of elvar, demonstrating heritage and political division among them. These include major houses—the Cloch, the Garraidh, and the lubhar (roughly Stone, Spear, and Wood). These three families lay claim to the creation and/or ownership of three of the artifacts found in Tír na nÓg. Bitter feuds between the houses are blamed for the elvar losing these artifacts. Looking to gain power or influence, each house plays with the royal families of Danaan like pawns, working to control the land if not the court. This puts them at odds with the Tuatha, who have the Queen's ear.

With an appearance similar to metahuman elves, they have made themselves quite at home in Tír na nÓg. Their disturbing skin and agelessness set them apart, though. They do not wrinkle, nor does their skin change with the effects of the sun. They are like porcelain dolls

with smooth, sculpted faces. The elvar are fascinated by metahuman aging. Many will take on children as servants, amusing themselves by watching them grow and age. They have the power to turn back the clock, temporarily taking on the burden of someone else's years. The metahuman might appear youthful again, but a double helping of exhaustion tends to accompany the return of the years. The elvar do this for entertainment, so they themselves can feel old, looking at wrinkles and watching their hair go white.

- And when they get tired of that game, the elvar send their servants back into the population, old, poor, and more tired than ever.
- Haze

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F	F	F+2	F+2	F	F	F	F	F	F	F

Initiative	[(F x 2) + 2] + 2D6
Astral Initiative	(F x 2) + 3D6
Condition Monitor (for Force4)	10/10
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Armor	0
Skills	Assensing, Astral Combat, Con, Counterspelling, Disenchanting, Gymnastics, Perception, Spellcasting
Powers	Astral Form, Aura Masking, Materialization, Energy Drain (Essence, Age), Fey Glamour, Sapience, Spirit Pact

EJERIAN

The ejerians are primarily astral beings who have the ability to inhabit objects to make their stay on our plane permanent. I've met several and interviewed them, though they communicate in mental images rather than words, so it can be a bit overwhelming and confusing, especially when misunderstandings and misinterpretations hinder the flow of information.

From what I've gathered, they are trying to find a new home plane because they have been exiled from their own. It could also be that they have simply left their own, but I got the impression it was not a choice to begin metaplanar exploration in order to find somewhere to settle. They don't have huge numbers, so this isn't like some monad or shedim invasion—they're just looking for a place to get away from the plight of their home plane.

On the astral, ejerians look like man-sized earthworms. In the physical world, they don't have a particular form or even a preferred object to inhabit. They are limited to inorganic materials, and no matter what they inhabit, the movement of the object becomes wormlike, making for a strange and alien appearance to nearly all vessels.

- I've seen these before. A whole mass of them came from an alley I was approaching. They slipped themselves into the parts of a passing Ford. I was curious, so I turned around and followed. The Ford parked ten minutes later, and after the driver was out of sight, the vehicle just wiggled to pieces.
- Haze

- You sure you weren't just high?
- Ironworker

- You're new, IW, but we're trying to avoid the personal commentary while we vet the newbies. Add valuable data or keep it to yourself.
- Bull

- There is a small cult of art collectors interested in objects that had been possessed by ejerians, grabbing them after the critters have been banished. They believe some trace, astral or otherwise, stays with the object
- Lyran

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F/2	F	F

Initiative	(F x 2) + 2D6
Movement	x1/x4/+1
Condition Monitor (for Force 3 & 4)	10/10
Limits	Physical (F x 4)/3, Mental (F x 4)/3, Social (F x 4)/3
Armor	*
Skills	Assensing, Astral Combat, Automatics, Blades, Clubs, Computer, First Aid, Gymnastics, Intimidation, Locksmith, Longarms, Perception, Pilot Ground Craft, Pistols, Sneaking, Throwing Weapons, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Astral Form, Aura Masking, Banishing Resistance, Hardened Mystic Armor (F), Possession, Sapience
	* Body and Armor are the Structure and Armor Ratings of the item they are in, augmented by the Force of the ejerian. Removing an ejerian requires banishment or the destruction of the object.

ERINYES

More and more of the spirits I encounter support the arcane theory of group consciousness shaping some aspects of the spiritual world, but none as strongly as the erinyes. While some argue that the legends of the erinyes were created by the existence of the erinyes and their visits to our plane, their extraplanar nature, the mundane focus of their activities, and the shift in that focus appear to be reflective of the modern mind rather than the classical view.

The universal base for the erinyes is a human female with black wings, a sharp-toothed maw that is perpetually bloody, and thick, muscular tentacles. At the heart of their nature is a being of pure wrath that has come to our plane as an executor of vengeance. Previously tied to the crimes of homicide, unfilial acts, hubris against the gods, and perjury, the modern erinyes focus on

crimes against women. Like the Wild Hunt, erinyes can be called to bring their wrath upon an individual. The use of such a ritual is dangerous, as the erinyes do not like to be contained.

At the receiving end, erinyes may be able to be pacified or appeased through a rite of atonement if the subject lives long enough. I have yet to discover their native metaplane. They are difficult to track—very few other metaplanar entities are willing to speak of them, and they have little to say to anyone who is not the recipient of their justice.

- This is Magister's stuff, not mine. I was submitting a document that talked about the connection between the erinyes and the traditions of Wicca as well as the historical accounts and behavioral connections being linked to the mindset and religious beliefs of the era. Religions would be the only things capable of generating the massive manipulation of mana needed during that era.
- G-Nome

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F+1	F+3	F+2	F	F	F	F	F	F+2	F	F

Initiative	[(F x 2) + 2] + 3D6
Movement	x2/x5/+4
Condition Monitor (for Force 4)	10/10
Limits	Physical (F x 4)/3, Mental (F x 4)/3, Social (F x 4)/3
Armor	(F x 2)H
Skills	Assensing, Astral Combat, Flight, Gymnastics, Perception, Sneaking, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Accident, Astral Form, Banishing Resistance, Concealment, Engulf (Air), Fear, Immunity (Normal Weapons), Influence, Materialization, Natural Weapon (Claws: DV (F+2)P, AP –F), Natural Weapon (Wings: DV (F+6)S, AP –Force, Knockdown), Psychokinesis, Sapience

GREEN MAN/ HEART OF THE CITY

There are a few great spirits that have made our world their home. Spirits that many believe were "born" alongside the formation of a city or the growth of a

forest. I believe, however, that they may have felt a connection to Gaia and were drawn here. They forge a strong bond to the area, which makes it impossible for them to leave. The advantage of this bond allows them to perform magic in much larger ways; the disadvantage is that they are impacted by events in the city as well. Many believe that many places have a spirit to them, but only a few have a true spirit that feels responsible for protecting the place and its inhabitants.

While they can be extremely powerful, the pledged bond to the location makes these spirits vulnerable in unusual ways. The most famous of these spirits is Zebulon, the Spirit of Denver. Zebulon presumably arrived in the 1850s and formed a connection to Denver during the early gold rush days. Because of simultaneous summoners in 2017 and creation of the Denver Treaty, Zebulon for a time was split into multiple spirits, each with a different persona, until Ghostwalker captured and bound the personalities back together.

Can these spirits die? All spirits can be disrupted, but death takes a little more time. With the bond, however, great spirits can die if the place they are bonded to is destroyed. Not many know of the great spirit of Chicago, Calumet. It had a brilliant engineering mind, and presumably arrived in 1871 to influence the construction of stone and steel structures. It became sick, though, as bugs infiltrated the city. Calumet died in 2055 after central Chicago became the Containment Zone.

While great spirits bound to urban areas are sometimes called a Heart of the City, other great spirits are tied to natural locations. These are often called Green Men, though they may be neither green nor what we consider masculine. For example, Alquitat of the Brocéliande Forest doesn't take attitude from metahumans nor the fae who travel through. Alquitat is not like the others who live in the city—he's more of a giant, overgrown by the forest itself.

The greatest power that these spirits have is to alienate an individual while they are on the spirit's territory. The phrase "Denver shuns you" has been adopted into slang, meaning you need to get out of town before something bad happens. The original quote comes from Zebulon, as the spirit brought special justice on a few people after becoming whole again. None are known to have survived Zebulon's shunning.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F-3	F-1	F+2	F+4	F	F	F	F	F/2	F	F

Initiative	[(F x 2) + 2] + 2D6
Astral Initiative	(F x 2) + 3D6
Condition Monitor (for Force 3 & 4)	12/10
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Armor	0
Skills	Assensing, Astral Combat, Counterspelling, Gymnastics, Leadership, Perception, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Accident (Domain), Alienate, Astral Form, Aura Masking, Banishing Resistance, Concealment (Domain), Confusion, (Domain), Engulf, Fear (Domain), Guard, Magical Guard, Materialization, Movement, Personal Domain, Sapience, Silence

IMP

From diminutive humanoids to whispering snakes to blobs of mist with a single eye, imps can come in a variety of appearances. It is thought that the imp's form is like a breed of dog or cat. While they despise metahuman kind, they are attracted to magical constructs that magicians can create. Why they are not in the squatters section is that they are only here for their insatiable hunger for Karma that metahumans can provide.

Imps are like hermit crabs. They are fragile in astral space as they slowly succumb to evanescence, but they have the ability to occupy magical objects on a permanent or semi-permanent basis to protect themselves, using it like a shell.

Imps begin as motes of magic tied to a reagent, giving it the appearance of a naturally refined reagent. This is the lure of prey in the imp's lifecycle. The young can survive in this state almost indefinitely. They remain dormant until a magician uses the reagent, then seek out a home in one of the magician's possessions. If the mage in question doesn't have a focus, the imp can be patient and hide in a preparation, attuned fetish, or even temporarily in a ritual.

Young imps work subtly, so as not to be detected. They use their powers to extend the life or potency of preparations in order to encourage the Awakened to continue to create such works. It will convince the spellcaster to spend Karma here and there as it manipulates preparations into more devastating effects. Once it grows stronger with that Karma, it will become more forceful in its tactics to convince the magician to continue obtaining or making foci.

Once an imp has possession of focus, it will then try to become the more dominant personality in the relationship with the magician, using focus addiction and psychological manipulation against the mage. An imp will try to occupy the mage's most powerful focus, usually measured in terms of Karma required to bond the it.

At this stage, an imp can use the Karma and part of its force to spawn the next generation into reagent material for the next victim. Imps are territorial and possessive, so the young must find new Awakened victims. Imps try to not kill their host, as it's not in their best interest, especially if they've broken down the magician's psyche. Even with the possibility of occupying a more powerful focus with another mage, they will stick with what they have built, allowing their children a chance at that focus/victim.

- Here's one of the weirdest things. Je su chin (an Amerind variant of imp) can be found all over the southern Cascades. Could it be that someone's lair has been booby trapped with imps?
- Axis Mundi

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
1	1	1+2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Initiative	[(F x 2) + 3] + 2D6
Astral Initiative	(F x 2) + 3D6
Condition Monitor (for Force 3 & 4)	10/10
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Armor	0
Skills	Alchemy, Assensing, Astral Combat, Con, Counterspelling, Disenchanting, Gymnastics, Intimidation, Perception, Spellcasting, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Astral Form, Aura Masking, Banishing Resistance, Compulsion, Control Focus*, Desire Reflection, Empathy*, Energy Drain (Karma)*, Guard*, Influence*, Innate Spell (Alter Memory)*, Immunity (Age, focus only), Magical Guard, Manipulate Magic (Ritual, Preparation), Possession (Inanimate Arcane Vessels only), Psychokinesis (Occupied Focus), Sapience, Spirit Pact
Optional Powers	Innate Spell (Mental Manipulation spells)*, Mystic Armor
Weaknesses	Evanescence
Notes	An imp in astral form can use only mana-based powers. Powers that are marked with an asterisk (*) may be exercised only on characters who are magically linked or bonded to the attuned item that the imp is possessing.

JARL

Many in the Unseelie Court are thought to be juvenile pranksters or uncouth astral monsters that like chaos and disruption. The jarl, however, are about as devious in plots and plans as those in Seelie Court, possibly even at a draconic level. They love metahumans and their need for money. The jarl work behind the scenes, offering precious metals, hard currency, or gems in return for services. Some spirits can conjure up gemstones, of course, but the jarl don't like that sort of personal astral signature to be so open and obvious, so they will find or steal the real stuff themselves (or get someone to get it for them).

A jarl hordes many of these treasures, enjoying how they feel in its hands. Unfortunately, they are never content with the treasure they amass. This feeling of greed is very palatable from a jarl. They exude sweat that can be considered concentrated and distilled greed. Taking objects handled by a jarl, or even shaking hands with them, can compel a person into obsessive thoughts of wanting more. The jarl will take full advantage of that if they get that sort of leverage over a person.

The jarl can negotiate spirit pacts, but they are more interested in less binding business negotiations. A jarl, however, doesn't often do face-to-face negotiations. They prefer a third-party representative, or if they are interested in who they are working with, they will use the novel "persona" icon over a commlink or set up a meeting at a costumed ball. The reason for this is that they are self-conscious of their appearance to metahumans. While they appear much like other elf-like fae, their faces are exagger-

ated rictuses, permanently frozen expressions of maniacal laughter or rage. Their mouths are often scabbed or have cracks from their attempts at breaking the rictus. A few wear makeup or cover their faces with kabuki-style masks.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F+2	F–1	F+2	F+2	F	F	F+2	F	3/2	F	F

Initiative	[(F x 2) +4] + 2D6
Astral Initiative	(F x 2) + 3D6
Condition Monitor (for Force 3 & 4)	11/10
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Armor	0
Skills	Assensing, Astral Combat, Counterspelling, Gymnastics, Leadership, Perception, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Astral Form, Aura Masking, Banishing Resistance, Compulsion, Desire Reflection, Materialization, Influence (Greed), Sapience

KAPPA

Kappas are Asian fairies talked about in Japanese mythology. They look like child-size humanoids with frog or turtle features, such as webbed feet, shells, or elongated legs. The faces of kappas have some simian features, but most people usually just notice the water-filled depression on top of their heads. This water is said to be source of their powers.

Often thought of as mischievous thanks to the legends about them, kappas are actually congenial and often befriend metahumans. The mischief that they cause are acts of rebellion, usually directed at an individual in order to teach them a lesson or change their behaviors. These efforts are rarely successful in the modern world, but kappa are old spirits and do not learn quickly.

As for the water in the bowls on their heads, the truth about it is still a mystery. Though I studied and spoke with them extensively, they laugh off the thought of water being their power and usually dip a finger into it and flick it at you when you ask.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F–2	F	F–1	F+1	F	F	F	F	F	F–2	F

Initiative	[(F x 2) – 1] + 2D6
Astral Initiative	(F x 2) + 3D6
Movement	x2/x4/+1
Condition Monitor (for Force 3 & 4)	13/10
Limits	Physical (F x 4)/3, Mental (F x 4)/3, Social (F x 4)/3
Armor	0
Skills	Assensing, Astral Combat, Exotic Ranged Weapon (Elemental Attack), Gymnastics, Perception, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Astral Form, Banishing Resistance, Concealment, Confusion, Elemental Attack (Water), Engulf (Water), Fey Glamour, Influence, Materialization, Movement, Sapience, Search, Vanishing
Weaknesses	Allergy (Fire, Severe)

KOKOPELLI

Kokopelli is a prominent figure in the folklore of native tribes across the American southwest. He has been called a fertility god, trickster, trader, musician, and sage. Petroglyphs of his iconic profile have been around for more than three thousand years. But on the metaplane of man, carvings and figurines of Kokopelli-like beings can be found among the relics of lost civilizations. These objects depict a race of astral travelers that have interacted with metahumans throughout history. The existence of these kokopellis is now relatively common knowledge, but their home metaplane remains a secret. Which raises the question: Why are they here?

- To procreate and create hybrid metahumans to fight the invading bug spirits!
- Plan 9

- It was a rhetorical question.
- Ethernaut

They have been known to travel with the seasons, arriving in the spring. They can be found walking alone with animal companions or hitching a ride and entertaining drivers with stories as they move down the road. Kokopellis tend to enjoy the company of metahumans. Some may offer their musical talents for food and drink, others find swap meets to engage in barter over trinkets they have picked up along the way. A kokopelli always carries a bag of goods as it travels.

Kokopellis are humanoid, slightly scrawny, and hunched over, with a prominent head and discernible facial features. They then also have some not-so-human features, such as the distinctive head crest and exoskeleton. Despite their inhuman appearance, many feel at ease around kokopellis, inviting them into their homes or parties.

- With the exception of people in Chicago. If it looks like a bug, they don't ask questions.
- Haze

Kokopeillis are more familiar with the human experience than other spirits, and they are able to entertain with practical jokes or give personal advice. While they are welcomed in various nations and tribes, they don't stay long. They may stop for two to three days, but they become restless and must continue their journey. This is also part of the mystery of the kokopellis—why do they travel, and where are they going?

- They travel to the edge of the deep metaplane as scouts in an ongoing mission against demons.
- Plan 9

- Rhetorical!
- Ethernaut

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F–1	F+2	F+2	F	F	F	1	1	1/2	1	1

Initiative	[(F x 2) + 2] + 2D6
Astral Initiative	(F x 2) + 3D6
Condition Monitor (for Force 4)	10/10
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Armor	0
Skills	Artisan, Assensing, Astral Combat, Leadership, Perception, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Accident, Astral Form, Banishing Resistance, Enthralling Performance (p. 23, Shadow Spells), Fey Glamour, Materialization, Sapience, Vanishing

MORBI

The morbi do not have a known metaplane of origin, nor are there any mythological references to them. The first mass sighting of morbi in the Sixth World was August 2017, when many were seen observing mountains in the Pacific Northwest before they erupted. Unsubstantiated stories report sightings as early as 2010. VITAS might have been what initially attracted them here.

- What about the Mothman or Owlman?
- Haze

- Inconclusive. They could be misinterpretations, but there's too many discrepancies.
- G-Nome

Morbi have large black eyes in proportion to their grey oval face, and their bodies are ambiguous forms beneath a cloak of something appearing like feathers or moth wings. The eyes do not have discernible metahuman anatomy. Instead they are like dark pools where the surface can ripple and shift in a fluid way. They

don't appear to show emotion—or rather, we don't see a change in their facial expression that we can interpret to be emotion.

They are odd spirits, attracted to disaster and death. They will stand in dark corners or look from a window, anticipating a train wreck, then walk through the carnage, pausing to observe a dying individual's gasp of air. Some may interact with the dying, but only to adjust their hair or straighten a tie. Others may rearrange the scene into possibly a gentle repose or some artistic pattern.

While the Awakened and even the mundane can see morbi when they manifest, spirits have trouble seeing them. Not sure how they do it, though it may be similar to the capabilities of mentor spirits. In any case, other astral denizens ignore morbi. They seem impartial to our material world, but there are questions on how they know of disastrous events. While there is possibility of divination, some believe that they are mischievous harbingers of chaos, capable of causing events and then watching them unfold. There may be truth in both. While we don't see emotion from morbi, it doesn't appear that they like to be disappointed. There have been correlations of nearby "freak accidents" if there wasn't enough tragedy in the initial event.

- Not sure what that means, but the story I know is that there was this Sammy who took souvenirs from every job. At one very messy operation, the Sammy looted the bodies of four execs. What he didn't know/pay attention to was the layout of the bodies, like how they were gently laid out after the "accident." After that, the Sammy become paranoid, as every day there was an almost-deadly freak accident. At then, at end of the week, he lost an eye and had a few teeth knocked out. While the "accidents" stopped, he wasn't the same.
- Pistons

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F	F	F+1	F–2	F	F	F+1	F+2	F/2	F	F

Initiative	[(F x 2) +2] + 2D6
Astral Initiative	(F x 2) + 3D6
Condition Monitor (for Force 4)	10/10
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Armor	0
Skills	Assensing, Astral Combat, Perception, Ritual Spellcasting, Sneaking, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Accident, Astral Form, Banishing Resistance, Enhanced Senses (Low Light), Innate Ritual (Augury), Magic Sense, Materialization, Search
Optional Powers	Deathlock

NOCNITSA

The chances of randomly running across one of these if you are one of the Awakened is quite rare. The nocnitsa

are smart enough to avoid individuals who can respond to their nightmare-inducing visits with mana-disrupting skills. That said, the likelihood of running into one of these when you are a decent metahuman being and you have friends with children increases dramatically, especially when you're me and curious about anything that could be even the least bit interesting in an arcane or parabiological manner.

Let me clarify what these things are. The nocnitsa were named after Slavic nightmare spirits. They match the description the eastern Europeans gave but have expanded their hunting grounds to include anywhere that has children. They usually appear as a female in a long black dress with a white veil and wispy white hair. The veil covers a hideous worm-eaten face with rotten flesh that the nocnitsa display in order to create fear in their preferred prey, namely young children.

The nocnitsa feed off the fear they create. First they feed off the fear of the sleeping child as they influence the dream of the sleeper to become nightmares. If the child sleeps long enough and provides enough sustenance, the nocnitsa leaves before the child wakes. If the child wakes too soon, the nocnitsa manifests to the woken child, appearing as a horrible ghost that has been known to scare children into unconsciousness, with one confirmed case being put into a coma. The nocnitsa are smart enough to only target children who are young and never ones where a parent or nearby guardian is Awakened, because they know their own limits and fragility.

When encountered, they tend to flee rather than fight, but if they do fight, they are easy to break but terrible to be struck by. They have the ability to induce fear—not just the normal ability that makes the victim run, but a method that draws out the worst fears of the victim and causes extended psychological damage.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F	F+4	F+5	F-2	F-1	F	F	F	F/2	F	F

Initiative	[(F x 2) + 5] + 3D6
Astral Initiative	(F x 2) + 3D6
Movement	x2/x5/+2
Condition Monitor (for Force 4)	9/10
Limits	Physical (F x 4)/3, Mental (F x 4)/3, Social (F x 4)/3
Armor	0
Skills	Assensing, Astral Combat, Perception, Sneaking, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Astral Form, Aura Masking, Banishing Resistance, Elemental Attack (Electricity), Fear, Guard, Materialization, Natural Weapon (Claw: DV (F-2)P, AP +2), Sapience
Weaknesses	Allergy (Light, Severe)
Notes	EMP attack is intended to affect lights; nocnitsa don't use it to attack living targets.

PHANTOM

The astral plane is flavored by metahumans' emotions and actions, and our astral surroundings are a chaotic blending of these flavors. It's probably this unique phenomenon that attracts phantoms. We have one category for phantoms, but I suspect that they can come from different metaplanes. Most appear as lanky humanoids, grotesquely stretched to four meters tall. They are under the squatter category as they "nest" in the astral background. They become attached to a location and don't want to leave it. Some phantoms create a magical connection to the nesting area, making it more difficult to remove them. This is called a Haunt, and it allows the phantom to have more physical control over their nest. Phantoms are the most common of spirit entities that the mundane encounter.

What is interesting is that, as they nest, they become psychically connected to the source or the background. For some, if there's a background connection to a deceased person, they can inherit strong memories and even change their appearance to allow them to act like conventional ghosts of pre-Awakening legend. Depending on the strength of the phantom and the emotional impression, ghosts can connect themselves to personal belongings of the deceased individual. These connections are called "ghost chains." Ghost chains allow the phantom limited freedom from their nesting area to where the connected items are located, along with resistance to banishment.

Even if they are not acting as ghosts, phantoms have a strong connection to the background of their Haunt, and they hate any change to it. They will covet items to keep that flavor of background, though they don't stray too far from their nesting location to collect them. Phantoms are mostly harmless, as they may tidy up a place at night or have a drink with a patron in the wee hours of the morning. More annoying phantoms could bring in and feed stray cats at your expense, or not approve of the companionship you come home with. If there's a change in the background, such as a cleansing ritual, it irritates them to no end. An irritated phantom will throw a tantrum until things are set right. These phantoms are called poltergeists. Poltergeists are not necessarily deadly, but they can have violent outburst where they can telekinetically throw items.

Background count can borderline on being toxic to phantoms when it comes to strong or intense violence in death. If a phantom nests in such a background, they can become obsessed with the background. They can become more than violent poltergeists, wanting to bring more death, even to the point of fixating on a way to murder people. These kinds of phantoms become grim reapers. Grim reapers can feed off the psychic release and energies created at the scenes of death, especially violent death. Grim reapers use ghost chains as well, but these chains have a darker connection. The body of

each of their victims become another object connected to the ghost chain. Like ghosts, grim reapers have limited freedom of movement through the chains. Unlike ghosts, grim reapers can animate their victims like corps cadavres (p. 128, *Hard Targets*). As a side note, there are a few odd cases noted by paramedics where patients who should have normally stabilized with medical care died, as if no treatment had been delivered. They are believed to be victims of a grim reaper.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F+1	F	F+2	F–2	F	F	F	F	F/2	F	F

Initiative	[(F x 2) + 2] + 2D6
Astral Initiative	(F x 2) + 3D6
Condition Monitor (for Force 4)	11/10
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Armor	0
Skills	Assensing, Astral Combat, Gymnastics, Perception, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Accident, Astral Form, Banishing Resistance, Compulsion, Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision, Thermographic Vision), Fear, Haunt, Possession, Psychokinesis
Optional Powers	Confusion, Deathlock, Exotic Melee Weapon (Scythe*), Ghost Chain, Movement, Noxious Breath, Paralyzing Touch or Howl, Sapience, Spirit Pact
	* The weapon does not have to be a scythe; it can be any weapon believed to be used by Death.

PRETA

The preta is a piteous creature, an astral dweller that seeks some earthly substance but is forever doomed never to fill its insatiable desire. The preta is a hideous monster of the astral plane that will stop at nothing and assault any obstacle in its path in order to acquire the treasure it desires.

I couldn't decide how to start this, so I left both of the intro sentences I wrote. It's hard to decide whether the preta is a creature to be pitied for its inability to satiate its hunger or to be feared for the length it will go to attempt to fill that insatiable appetite. In either case, the entity is entirely astral in nature and can only make contact with the physical world by ripping a small gap in the fabric between the two planes. This gap allows the spirit to take and manipulate physical objects, but only for a short period of time. Once it crosses the rift, it suffers rapid degradation and energy sapping. Thus, every bit of material it finds that feeds its appetite also comes at a cost.

Occasionally a single preta will find a vast supply of the substance it desires and will go to strange and extreme measures in order to keep it. A preta I came to refer to as Smiley, due to the perpetual grin created by the emaciated look of its face, fed off of metahuman sweat. After finding a club in Amazonia that always had hot, sweaty, dancers, Smiley tore through the astral and began licking the patrons. Somehow

this was not a completely horrifying experience, and the place went crazy with dancers trying to get licked. Smiley was completely sated the first night, and the news drew more dancers over subsequent nights. Smiley was well fed.

Then local authorities took issue with an astral being feeding off locals. They assumed it was taking something less corporeal while licking them. Smiley found out the locals were planning to have the club shut down, so he spent tons of energy ripping open rifts at the doors to prevent anyone from getting in or out. The crowd entered a rebellious frenzy of crazy dancing until they realized they, too, were trapped.

Four days later the rifts finally faded, and when the authorities came in, they found fifty dead from exhaustion/dehydration and another twelve dehydrated, starved, and barely alive—myself among them.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F-1	F+1	F+2	F-1	F	F	F	F	F	F	F

Initiative	[(F x 2) + 2] + 2D6
Astral Initiative	(F x 2) + 3D6
Movement	[illegible]
Condition Monitor (for Force 4)	10/10
Limits	Physical (F x 4)/3, Mental (F x 4)/3, Social (F x 4)/3
Armor	Force(H)
Skills	Assensing, Astral Combat, Con, Intimidation, Negotiation, Perception, Sneaking, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Accident, Astral Form, Aura Masking, Banishing Resistance, Binding, Compulsion, Concealment, Confusion, Fear, Hardened Mystic Armor (F), Influence, Materialization, Natural Weapon (Fist: DV (F-1)S, AP -Force), Psychokinesis, Sapience, Search

STABBER

If the peaceforms are the hippies of the astral vagabond community, the stabbers are the serial-killing sociopaths. The bad part about stabbers is that they feed off the emotional energy of pain, and they've found the best way to cause pain is to stab metahumans with their barbed tentacles.

They rarely communicate, and in fact my research has shown no indications of them understanding our language at all. They attack without provocation immediately after manifesting on our plane. They will often manifest in the center of a crowded area and stab multiple targets in quick succession. The design of their barbed tentacles is such that they are extremely painful going in, and any movement while they are present in a target causes more pain. Physical removal is also extremely painful unless done properly by a trained medic. Getting medical attention to the victim is usually impossible, since the stabber will attack anyone who gets close enough to deliver care. The best remedy for removal is to destroy the physical form of the stabber and force it back into its astral form, which removes the barbed tentacle.

On the physical plane, stabbers appear as floating gel-like spheres with hundreds of dangling tentacle arms, similar to a jellyfish. Their appearance is the same on the astral and has led several to believe they are somehow related to the shedim, which share a similar jellyfish-like astral appearance.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F+1	F+4	F+2	F+4	F	F	F	F	F/2	F	F

Initiative	[(F x 2) + 2] + 3D6
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Condition Monitor (for Force 4)	11/10
Limits	Physical (F x 4)/3, Mental (F x 4)/3, Social (F x 4)/3
Armor	(F x 2)H
Skills	Assensing, Astral Combat, Gymnastics, Perception, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Agonizing Pain (double pain modifiers), Astral Form, Aura Masking, Banishing Resistance, Immunity (Normal Weapons), Materialization, Natural Weapon (Tentacle: DV (F+6)P, AP –F, see note for more damage details), Paralyzing Touch, Regeneration, Sapience
Notes	First Aid + Logic [Mental] (4) to remove barbed tentacles. Each hit reduces 4P unresisted damage by one; tentacles stay attached to anything that is hit and takes at least 1 box of damage.

TUNGAK

When I first encountered one of these beings, I thought it would be a great addition to my archive of toxically corrupted paracritters. Further research had me unable to discover a progenitor species, because I couldn't even identify species characteristics of the tungak. Then the creature I was studying died, and the spirit that was possessing it slipped out and found a new host. I was relieved that my scientific study skills were no longer in question but horrified at this spirit of disease moving from host to host, spreading death.

The name and some of the earliest studies of this phenomenon came from Siberia, where there was supposedly a spirit responsible for all the colds and sickness. While science cleared the truth up, the collective consciousness is what shapes mana to take form, and the tungak is the form for the Siberians' collective thoughts on disease causing. Once the spirit has formed, it is no longer beholden or limited to those who believe, and instead exists through the presence of mana.

Once it has taken a host, the diseased aspects of the spirit begin to seep through quickly. The health of the victim also declines rapidly, and after a short time the host is little more than a puppeted body being animated by the

spirit. Once the host dies, the spirit seeks a new host. The tungak isn't limited to metahumans and will move into any weak-willed animal or even nearby paracritter.

Occasionally a tungak becomes fixated on a person or a particular location and seeks to spread its pestilence through the population until everyone is dead. Situations like this often call for people skilled in combat, graced by a touch of greed, and kept unaware about the specifics of the tungak pestilence. Runners are often duped to do a milk run where the tungak is active. Exposure gets them infected, and then the locals lay on the age-old tale that says killing the tungak is the only way to cure the disease. From what I can tell, it's a lie, but I've also yet to see a tungak completely destroyed. Some have been disrupted or even destroyed on the astral, but I believe destruction would require a metaplanar journey to their home metaplane, which is not a place anyone would want to go.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F+1	F	F+2	F-2	F	F	F	F	F	F	F

Initiative	[(F x 2) + 2] + 2D6
Astral Initiative	(F x 2) + 3D6
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Condition Monitor (for Force 4)	11/10
Limits	Physical (F x 4)/3, Mental (F x 4)/3, Social (F x 4)/3
Armor	(F x 2)H
Skills	Assensing, Astral Combat, Gymnastics, Perception, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Accident, Astral Form, Banishing Resistance, Confusion, Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision, Thermographic Vision), Guard, Immunity (Normal Weapons), Pestilence (Host), Possession, Sapience, Search

VER

Vers appear as layers of shadow and ink coalesced into an asymmetric, web-shaped beast. On a white background, they might look like a traumatizing Rorschach test. The edges of the ver are semi-translucent, giving it an advantage in sneaking. Somewhere in the recesses of the shadowy body is a mouth full of teeth, from which it hisses and attempts to bite anything that comes in range. Vers come from one of the hyper-metaplanes of shadow (see *Aetherology*), where they are often sacrificed on the Blood Moon in mysterious rituals. In the Sixth World, vers have been transported by twisted magicians or accidentally come through unguarded astral gates causing unknown havoc. With each, vers have been found not only to have escaped and survived, but thrived. Part of the reason is tied to vers' consumption of other spirits. They have the ability to stave off evanescence by absorbing essence from a native spirit. We assume this also to be true if the ver attacks an astral mage or a summoned spirit.

- I've heard of bounties offered by Atilonobos on the Metaplane of Man. The problem I had with the deal was having to travel to the ID.
- Ethernaut

- Smuggling predatory animals is a risky job. I assume that risk increases with smuggling spirits (if possible).
- Haze

Vers are opportunistic hunters, even eating their own if food is scarce. They may seem small, but they can hunt in packs. They also are venomous. Unique to the ver is what is described as "psychic venom." When a spirit is bitten by a ver, not only does the spirit feel it, but this toxin travels along the connected line to the magician. If the spirit is dismissed or leaves the magician's control, the magician experiences painful feedback. Spirits "killed" by the ver on a different metaplane than their own don't go back disrupted as normal, they start to die where they are, which is probably the intent of the venom.

- Interesting. Dumpshock for mages.
- Haze

A ver at the end of its lifecycle may give birth to multiple ver. Maybe a dozen smaller ver erupt from a single parent. They consume the parent and some of weaker ver, leaving about three or four to survive in the wild.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
4	5	5	5	4	4	3	3	4	6	6

Initiative	8 + 2D6
Astral Initiative	6 + 3D6
Movement	x2/x4/+2
Condition Monitor	10/10
Limits	Physical 7, Mental 5, Social 6
Armor	0
Skills	Assensing 4, Astral Combat 4, Running 4, Sneaking 8, Tracking 5, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Astral Form, Astral Venom, Banishing Resistance, Enhanced Senses (Smell), Magic Sense, Materialization, Movement, Search, Shadow Cloak, Silence
Weaknesses	Evanescence

VUCUB CAQUIX

Prior to and in the early years of the Awakening, the macaw was slowly hunted to near extinction. Then came the vucub caquix, or Mayan demon bird. First thought to be an Awakened relative of the macaw, one capable of severing limbs with its talons, further studies showed it to be a macaw possessed by an extraplanar being. These inhabiting spirits came over and joined with macaws all over Central and South America, as well as a few that inhabited pet macaws around the world.

The inhabitation drastically alters the growth rate of the macaw, and they quickly reach their vucub caquix stature. As they rapidly grow, they gain the distinctive crown and hardened exoskeletal chest scales that make it impossible to mistake them for a regular macaw. Coloration tends to stay the same, though feather colors always appear more vibrant due to the glowing orb that orbits the creature at all times. The orb is a radiant ball of hot light. It isn't fire as we would explain it but rather concentrated light energy, like a laser ball. Objects that come in contact with the orb vaporize instantly, including metals. The orb defends and protects the vucub, and it seems to be a physical manifestation of their immunity power.

It's unclear why these extraplanar beings chose the macaw, but previous visits to our metaplane may be the reason for the legends of their namesake.

- The places these things protect have high populations of wild macaws thanks to the vucub, but the critters also tend to create their territory near old Mayan ruins. This has hammered the tourist business for some of these locations. Corporate patrons that want to be adventurers hire protection for their excursions.
- Traveler Jones

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
F+3	F+5	F+4	F+2	F	F	F+1	F+4	F	F	F

Initiative	[(F x 2) + 5] + 2D6
Movement	x1/x2/+1 (x2/x5/+5 Flight)
Condition Monitor (for Force 4)	12/10
Limits	Physical (F x 4)/3, Mental (F x 4)/3, Social (F x 4)/3
Armor	12H
Skills	Assensing, Flight, Perception, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Aura Masking, Banishing Resistance, Compulsion, Concealment, Engulf (Fire), Fear, Immunity (Normal Weapons), Materialization, Natural Weapon (Claws/Bite; DV (Force+2)P, AP —), Possession, Regeneration, Sapience

WILD HUNT

The Wild Hunt is not a single spirit, but more of an organization or order, bound by old and powerful magic—possibly older than the Seelie Court itself. Leaders of the Seelie Court can call upon the Wild Hunt as an instrument of justice. Others, including metahumans, can attempt to call upon them (p. 126, *Street Grimoire*), but it's difficult to control them or have sufficient payment for their actions. In all cases, the sight of them is considered an ill omen. They usually manifest as a hunting party on horseback, with hounds running alongside. Weapons and armor can be from any time period.

The Wild Hunt has one leader, whom the fae or unfortunate magician must deal with. He has been called Wotan, Berchtold, and Herne in the past, though currently he prefers Chalcis. Chalcis is recognizable by the helmet/faceguard he always wears. It is unclear whether the leader has a limited lifespan, if there is promotion within the ranks, or why the name changes. Regardless, his fellow huntsmen follow his word. The size of the Wild Hunt varies, though at minimum it contains Chalcis and two companions, be they huntsmen or hounds.

The Wild Hunt, as the name implies, usually has one goal in mind, and it will chase across the earth to achieve that goal. Often the goal is to kill or capture an individual and bring back whatever trophy is requested by the magician, though there are legends of phantom armies razing cities. The Seelie Court may punish a metahuman by forcing them to be chased by the Wild Hunt for a night. This may seem like an absurd sport, but neither the court nor Chalcis take any amusement from the task.

Besides the leader and his fellow huntsmen, lower spirits are bound by the same magic to hunt alongside them. Many of the stories describe them in canine form, such as hounds or wolves. The only noted exception has been large ravens. The same can be said for the huntsmen's mounts, which are always equine. Regardless of technological advances, the Wild Hunt always rides on horseback. The reason for this may be rooted deep in metahuman psychology.

- Some say the Wild Hunt changes with each person's perspective and has no true form.
- Man-of-Many-Names

Only the worthiest of fae can survive the ritual and join the ranks of the Wild Hunt. Those who fail to meet that measurement become lowly hounds.

CHALCIS (GREAT HUNTER)

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
10	11	11	9	9	9	9	9	9	6	9

Initiative	20 + 2D6
Astral Initiative	18 + 3D6
Movement	x2/x4/+2(x8/x10/+6 when riding)
Condition Monitor	13/13
Limits	Physical 13, Mental 12, Social 11
Armor	0
Skills	Archery, Assensing, Astral Combat, Blades, Counterspelling, Exotic Ranged Weapon (Elemental Attack), Flight, Gymnastics, Perception, Spellcasting, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Armor, Astral Form, Banishing Resistance, Confusion, Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision, Thermographic Vision), Fey Glamour, Magic Sense, Materialization, Movement, Search, Vanishing
Optional Powers	Energy Aura (Cold), Elemental Attack (Electricity), Immunity to Illusion Spells, Skill (choose any Combat Skill), Weather Control
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Severe)

HUNTER

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
8	9	9	8	6	6	6	6	7	6	7

Initiative	15 + 2D6
Astral Initiative 12 + 3D6	18 + 3D6
Movement	x2/x4/+2(x8/x10/+6 when riding)
Condition Monitor	12/11
Limits	Physical 11, Mental 8, Social 8
Armor	0
Skills	Archery, Assensing, Astral Combat, Blades, Exotic Ranged Weapon (Elemental Attack), Flight, Gymnastics, Perception, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Astral Form, Banishing Resistance, Confusion, Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision, Thermographic Vision), Fey Glamour, Magic Sense, Materialization, Movement, Search, Vanishing
Optional Powers	Animal Control (all mundane critters), Skill (choose any Combat Skill)
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Severe)

HOUND

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
6	5	6	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4

Initiative	10 + 2D6
Astral Initiative	8 + 3D6
Movement	x2/x4/+4
Condition Monitor	11/10
Limits	Physical 7, Mental 6, Social 6
Armor	0
Skills	Assensing, Astral Combat, Running, Sneaking, Tracking, Unarmed Combat
Powers	Astral Form, Banishing Resistance, Enhanced Senses (Smell), Fear, Magic Sense, Materialization, Movement, Search, Vanishing
Optional Powers	Enhanced Senses (Smell), Sonic Projection (Bellowing)
Weaknesses	Allergy (Sunlight, Severe)

WOOG

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	M
3	4	4	3	3	2	3	5	3	6	4

Initiative	7 + 2D6
Astral Initiative	6 + 3D6
Movement	x2/x4/+4
Condition Monitor	10/10
Limits	Physical 5, Mental 4, Social 7
Armor	0
Skills	Assensing 7, Con 5, Escape Artist 6, Gymnastics 4, Locksmith 3, Perception 4, Performance 3, Unarmed Combat 3
Powers	Astral Form, Concealment, Create Alchera, Guard, Materialization, Sapience, Search

CALLING THE WILD HUNT

In summoning, the minimum Force for the Wild Hunt is 9. This represents Chalcis (Great Huntsman). When on an agreed-upon task at this Force, the Great Huntsman has two hunters at his side to complete it. For every point of Force above 9, the Wild Hunt adds another hunter. Every 2 points increases all of the Great Huntsman's attributes by 1. The hunter stats provided here are for Force 7 hunters. The hunters can be reduced to Force 5 (reducing all listed attributes by 2) to add two hounds to the composition of the Wild Hunt. Hounds listed here are at Force 4.

One of the more odd and benign metaplanar creatures to visit here is the woog. Like the kokopelli, they have traveled to the metaplane of man and the physical plane. Unlike the kokopelli, they are more like vagrants that have recently arrived. Woog appear as balls of fuzz that roll around. Most of this body consists of a large eye and mouth. It also has arms and hands, which it tucks away while rolling.

Woog can be found wandering barrens areas and shopping malls, thieving or dumpster-diving for trash and trinkets. They are nuisances that build homes in empty corners to keep their hoards, or they dump and drag trash through public places. Woog have an obsessive fascination over things like the color, texture, or minute details like the crinkling sound of wrappers. Woog have bags of such trash where they camp. They must not have any sense of smell, as the putrefication doesn't seem to bother them.

- If they had money, corporations would make them citizens, as they are attracted to the trinkets and trash the corps throw to the masses.
- Haze

While they don't live in communities, they do live in the same general area if there's enough pickings. More powerful woog can start creating space by pushing their "treasures" into astral space. This ability to create an alchera is unique and fascinating, unfortunately it will also start to clutter up the astral plane. Elder woog believe that when they die, they can take their stuff with them; however, this author doesn't believe it's possible to move material objects to another metaplane.

- There was a woog I knew who loved clear plastic bottles. So much so that he attempted to displace a whole recycling center in Seattle. People weren't too happy about that. He ended up, I think, living in a vending machine outside a Stuffer Shack, as it had pretty bottles of different colors.
- Axis Mundi

A RUN IN THE WOODS

"There it is, boys—the beautiful green maze we have to run to earn our pay."

Actaeon wasn't usually one for flowery language, but something about being in the great outdoors brought out that side of him. And the snow-covered northern Michigan pine forest before him was the greatest sight the outdoors had offered him in quite a while.

For a moment, Actaeon forgot about his team's mission to find and infiltrate the Ares facility in that forest, opening all of his senses to the beautiful natural world around him. He felt the cold winter air on his exposed face, heard the singing of birds and the howling of the wind, and stared in awe at every sparkle of the morning sun reflecting off the undisturbed snow.

"You are enjoying this way too much for any sane man."

Actaeon winced as NoScope's voice shook him out of his reverie. The damn elf had been bitching about the cold ever since they'd started out two days ago, and by now Actaeon was ready to finish the job just so he didn't have to hear it anymore.

"Zaroff! Halley! Get your asses over here!" NoScope shouted over his shoulder.

"Will you keep it the frag down?!" Actaeon whispered as he spun to face the elf. "Now's not the time to be advertising our presence!"

"Now's not the time for those lazy trogs to be dragging their asses either," NoScope replied. "Besides, you could throw a rock and not hit anyone out here—why the worry?"

"Because sound travels farther in cold air, moron," Zaroff said as he jogged up to Actaeon, Halley following close behind. "There could be corp guards kilometers away that heard your little outburst."

"Nice to know *somebody* paid attention to my wilderness survival crash course," Actaeon quipped with a smile.

"All right, all right, enough talk," Halley piped up. "Let's get moving. I feel like my whole body's an itchy trigger finger. I need my exercise!"

Actaeon chuckled. The boisterous troll had been itching for a fight ever since the mission started, and he seemed even more anxious now that the facility was so temptingly near.

"Agreed," Actaeon said. "Let's get moving. I did a bit of recon around the outer rim of the forest before dawn. As you can see, it's a big one, so we might have a long search ahead. No security guards or critters I could see, though. Still, remember the big three rules: Keep your eyes open, keep it stealthy, and always stick together. Got it?"

Everyone nodded.

"Good. Diamond formation, people. I'll take point. Zaroff on my right, Halley on my left. NoScope, bring up the rear."

With that, the runners slowly walked towards the green labyrinth that hid their target.

BY CHRIS MASTEY

After a few minutes on the move, Actaeon found himself impressed with his team's coordination and silence. They hadn't once broken formation, and the only sounds he'd heard from them were the slight rustling of their clothes and the crunch of snow underneath their boots. Not even their guns slapped against their bodies.

Their silence gave him the opportunity to hear the sounds of the forest for the first time since they entered. It was almost as enthralling to first hear the place as it was to first see it—the *whoosh* of the cold winter wind blowing through the trees, the far-off rapid tapping of woodpeckers foraging for food, the chirping of tiny birds flying overhead ...

Time for that later, Actaeon. You've got a job to do.

"Zaroff, any life signs on the astral?" Actaeon asked.

"Sorry, but I'm not even gonna try that in here," the ork replied. "Between the trees and the native wildlife, trying to find anything specific on the astral would be pointless."

Damn. I didn't think of that.

"All right, just keep your eyes open then," Actaeon replied, pulling out his binoculars. "I'll help you out."

Zaroff nodded.

"Halley, start scanning for wifi," Actaeon whispered. "That facility has to have some kind of contact with the outside world. I want to get the drop on them if possible."

"Roger that," Halley said. He manipulated a few AROs only he could see, executing operations that would no doubt have been way over Actaeon's head.

Gazing through his binoculars, Actaeon chuckled quietly to himself as he juxtaposed the high-tech nature of his last order with the natural beauty he saw. Small, brown-and-white finch birds were everywhere, flitting from tree to tree in search of food. Sweeping to his right, he saw a herd of majestic white-tailed deer a good distance away.

"Dammit," Halley growled quietly.

"What is it?" Actaeon asked.

"My damn deck's being fragged with," Halley said. "I can't get a damn reading on anything. Our PANs are coming in fine, but anything beyond that is just so much static."

"It's probably noise," NoScope said. "Should've planned for a bad signal this far away from civilization, you stupid trog."

"I *did* plan for that, keeb!" Halley snapped. "I had a friend upgrade this thing just before we left! My deck shouldn't be this much of a paperweight!"

Actaeon was no expert at electronics, but experience had taught him to leave such matters to those who were. It had also taught him that this degree of concern from an expert was a bad sign.

"Could be a jamming device somewhere in here.," Actaeon said. "Keep trying."

Half an hour of searching later, the team was no closer to finding the facility, and Halley was nowhere closer to fixing the static issue.

"I swear to fragging Ghost, it's just getting worse the deeper we go!" Halley whispered in frustration as he jogged up to Actaeon and thrust his cyberdeck into his face. "Here, look at this!"

Actaeon put his hand up in a "halt" signal, then took Halley's deck and looked at the screen. He might as well have been reading an alien language.

"Halley, I'm not a tech guy," Actaeon said, handing the deck back. "Can you translate this?"

"The upshot is that even our PANs are starting to come in fuzzy, let alone wireless networks," Halley replied. "This static is way worse than it should be, even for a forest like this. And no, I don't think it's a jamming device, at least not like any I've seen."

Actaeon closed his eyes, trying to concentrate. For a brief second, he let his teammates' voices fade away, hearing only the winter wind, the flapping of birds flying overhead and the occasional loud tapping of several nearby woodpeckers.

Finally, he thought of something.

"Can you home in on the source of the jamming signal?" Actaeon asked Halley.

Halley thought for a moment before he began tapping his deck.

"Hold on a second," he said. "It might be possible ... see if I can isolate ..."

Actaeon let his mind wander as the troll rambled to himself in technobabble. If he knew deckers, this could take a while.

"Got it!" Halley exclaimed a second later.

Actaeon rushed over to look at the deck's screen, despite knowing he wouldn't understand a word on it.

"So where is the jamming coming from?" Actaeon asked.

"Short answer?" Halley replied. "Everywhere. It's not just one signal. It's multiple ones from all around us, and they're overlapping like mad."

Actaeon suddenly felt a little less at home in the forest he'd been admiring for the past half hour.

"It's really weird," Halley continued. "It looks like the jamming zones keep blinking in and out of existence every few seconds, like they're firing on and off in some kind of sequence. I've never seen anything like it."

"Point us to the nearest one," Actaeon ordered. "Let's move!"

Actaeon let Halley lead the team deeper into the forest, both he and the troll staring at the deck's constantly glitching screen.

"Closing in," Halley whispered after about a minute, pointing ahead. "It should be in that tree over there."

"Ready weapons," Actaeon whispered, chambering a round in his hunting rifle.

A few seconds later, the runners were standing next to a giant pine tree, easily large enough to be a rich guy's Christmas decoration.

"Hang on," Halley replied, fiddling with his deck. "Maybe I can pinpoint the location a bit more precisely ... filter out the ..."

Before Actaeon could let his mind wander again, Halley pointed at a spot about halfway up the tree.

"Got it! Up there!"

Actaeon followed the troll's finger and saw a familiar shape among the branches: the black-and-white feathered body of a pileated woodpecker.

After a few seconds of stunned silence, NoScope finally spoke up, his words echoing Actaeon's thoughts.

"You have *got* to be fraggin' kidding me ..."

As if in response, the small bird tapped its beak on the pine's trunk.

"Shit!" Halley exclaimed.

"Static?" Actaeon asked.

"The worst yet!" Halley answered. "And it nearly crashed my fragging scanning program too!"

A technocritter. Actaeon had heard of these things before, but he'd never seen one. All of a sudden, Ares' decision to place their facility here made a lot more sense.

"Eat lead, Woody!"

Actaeon spun around in response to NoScope's exclamation, just in time to see him level his Predator V at the bird.

"No! Don't—"

Too late. Less than a second later, the unfortunate bird was nothing more than a cloud of blood and feathers.

White mist rising from his flaring nostrils, Actaeon stormed towards NoScope, slapping the gun from the elf's hand and grabbing him by the collar.

"Are you out of your fraggin' mind?!" he whispered.

"Hey, we haven't got time for this animal rights bulldrek!" NoScope shouted. "You heard Halley—the damn thing was jamming us! I solved the problem!"

"Yeah, congratulations—you shot *one* bird!" Actaeon hissed. "One out of hundreds, maybe thousands, in this forest! Unless you planned on culling them completely, all you did was give away our position!"

"Guys, you need to take a look at this!"

The urgency in Zaroff's voice swiftly shifted Actaeon's attention. Forgetting all about his idiotic elf comrade, he rushed over to where the ork and Halley stood over a grounded, twitching finch.

"I think NoScope clipped the poor thing when he shot the woodpecker," Zaroff said. "But take a look at the wound."

Actaeon knelt down to examine the animal more closely. Zaroff was right; there was a nasty graze wound on the little bird's head, and its skull looked fractured. It wouldn't survive much longer.

Then Actaeon saw what Zaroff was talking about.

Through the wound, Actaeon saw first a gleam of metal, then a set of tiny wires and circuits.

"Cybereyes," Halley said. "Ares Model XIX, to be specific. And according to my deck, they're linked into some kind of encrypted network. Can't pin down any details yet, but I'm willing to bet it's the facility's and that it's shielded against the jamming."

A chill traveled down Actaeon's spine as the implications of Halley's words hit him.

"NoScope, forget what I just said," Actaeon ordered, bringing his hunting rifle up. "Let's take a couple more birds down. Not the woodpeckers though, just the pine siskin finches—the ones with the striped white bellies."

"Why the sudden change of heart?" NoScope asked peevishly, readying his weapon.

"Because I've got a really bad feeling about this," Actaeon replied, all irritation gone from his voice.

Actaeon peered through his rifle's scope, targeting a siskin perched on a branch. He squeezed the trigger, sending a round through his target's chest. The bird tumbled from its

perch into the snow below, a small puff of white powder erupting where it hit.

Actaeon barely heard NoScope's shots as he walked over to his fallen target and knelt down, needing only a second of examination to find what he was dreading: the same cybereye system.

"NoScope?" Actaeon called out, hoping for better news.

"This one's got it too," the elf replied.

The chill down Actaeon's spine suddenly became a full-blown fright that froze his blood worse than the winter wind ever could. The forest no longer felt like a welcoming place of natural beauty, but like a deathtrap from the twisted mind of a serial killer.

Shake it off! Remember the mission!

"Let's find that damn facility so we can get the hell out of here," Actaeon snapped. "Form up and everyone but Halley keep your wireless presence to a bare minimum. Halley, see if you can break into that network—"

Actaeon cut himself off as he spotted something out of the corner of his eye—a large, transparent shape.

What the hell?

"Unknown contact," Actaeon whispered, pointing at the shape. "See it?"

"Yeah," Zaroff replied. "Let me get an astral peek."

Before Zaroff could say another word, the shape surged toward him in a blur of motion. A sickening *crack* rang out as it rammed him square in the chest, hurling him backwards into a tree trunk, the impact producing another *crack* that Actaeon knew could only be vertebrae snapping.

He only needed one glance at Zaroff's broken form to know that the ork was dead.

"Take it down!" Actaeon shouted, firing the first shot. NoScope's Predator and Halley's Mossberg followed suit, every shot hitting its mark and producing a spray of blood.

As the shape fell under the barrage, it gradually became more distinct until Actaeon could clearly see what it was: a white-tailed doe. A member of the herd he had observed earlier, in fact.

"What the hell?!" NoScope asked. "Did we just discover a species of Awakened deer or something?!"

"No, I think the answer's more mundane," Halley replied as he knelt down beside the deer.

"What do you mean?" Actaeon asked as he joined him.

"Take a look," Halley said, pointing at one of the corpse's many bullet wounds. "See the flexible polymer between the layers of skin? That's a mix of Kevlar and ruthenium, and I'll bet it's been tweaked to give the deer adaptive coloration. I'm seeing evidence of muscular enhancement in the body too."

Actaeon seethed as he looked at the dead doe. Once it was a docile, peaceful animal. Now it was nothing more than a guard beast, augmented to hunt and kill and maddened into doing so by those same enhancements. Was there *nothing* the damn corps wouldn't defile in the name of their profit margins?

"Guys?" NoScope called out, his voice tinged with fright. "I think we've got big problems."

Actaeon turned his head and immediately saw what NoScope was talking about—more cloaked deer, their translucent forms now completely surrounding the team.

"Shit," Actaeon growled, chambering another round. "Everyone back-to-back!"

As the three runners took up formation, the herd of deer charged as one, a coil of refracted light tightening around them.

"Fire away!" Actaeon ordered, already shooting at what looked like his target's head. He was rewarded with a spray of blood and brain matter as the charging buck decloaked and hit the ground. It skidded to a halt, the corpse plowing a path into the snow.

As he fired on his next target, Actaeon heard from behind him the repeating thunder of Halley's full-auto Mossberg and the bomb-like reports of NoScope's Predator as they picked their targets. Several weighty *thuds* followed the gunshots, no doubt made by the deer falling under the powerful rounds' impacts.

Any comfort those sounds brought Actaeon was immediately crushed by what he heard next.

"Halley, look out!"

NoScope barely finished his warning before a thunderous impact threw Actaeon to the ground, pain shooting through his chest as he landed face down on his rifle. Shaking it off as best he could, Actaeon rolled over to see what had just happened.

Halley lay five meters away, the side of his torso torn completely open by the impact of a deer's charge. Next to him was NoScope, his heavy winter clothing stained with blood, struggling to get back on his feet.

NoScope barely regained his footing before another deer charged. Fountains of gore erupted from the elf's chest and back as the beast's antlers pierced his heart, turning his body into a grisly trophy hovering in mid-air.

Oh, frag this!

Actaeon hopped to his feet and took off running as fast as he could through a break in the beasts' ranks, ignoring the hundreds of footfalls that echoed behind him as the deer gave chase.

Gotta get out of here. Gotta survive to report this. Gotta ...

Actaeon's escape and thoughts were both cut off by the worst pain he'd ever felt surging through his chest, knocking the wind out of him and sending him stumbling backwards. As he fell into the snow, he saw the telltale shimmer of a cloaked deer in front of him, flecks of blood marking where its crown had collided with him.

Dammit ...

Actaeon felt like he was trapped in hardened concrete as he struggled to his feet. Every movement, every breath sent another pulse of horrendous pain radiating out from his chest and into every cell of his body. He collapsed backwards again after only a few steps, howling in pain, his breathing more ragged by the second and his vision growing dimmer.

As if rushing in to fill the vacuum left by his fading senses, a thought burst into Actaeon's mind with perfect clarity, accompanied by an odd sense of serenity.

This is it. This is where I die.

As the outdoorsman-shadowrunner resigned himself to his fate, he took one last look at the forest towering above him, the snow-covered pine trees producing a sight so beautiful he couldn't help but smile.

Incredible. I couldn't have asked for a better view on my way out.

Seconds later, the parade of white, green, and brown faded to black as the spark of life left Actaeon's body.

TECHNOCRITTERS

If you don't have money, make up for it with time. That was Sorsha's motto. Building her ant colony had taken a long time. Painstaking time in the Barrens, looking in the walls of rotting buildings and mounds of dirt, holding up her custom-made (but cheap) detector that could tell her when one of the bugs was emitting a wireless signal. There were days, many days, when she didn't find a single digit. A good day was when she found two. And she couldn't go out and look every day, because she had a life to live and food to attempt to find. She went out when she had a chance, and she found digits by one and two until she had a good-sized colony in an ant farm in the basement of an abandoned warehouse.

She had her army. Now it was time to conquer.

Brothels are not social by nature. You get two, maybe three, maybe four people in a room together, but that's about it. People aren't there to chat with each other, and they usually don't engage in small talk on their way in and out. The people were strung out, not concentrated in one place, which was the way she wanted it.

She put the ant farm in her backpack, rode until she was a kilometer away from the brothel, and walked the rest of the way. People inside either didn't notice her approaching or didn't care. She walked over to the east wall—she had scouted the location, she knew that's where the most rot was—took a breath, cast a spell, then opened the case. She watched her tribe scurry away to freedom, most of them heading for the wall, like they were supposed to. She felt a small welling of emotion as they left, then she tamped it down with the thought that this was her only chance, after so much work, and she had better make it count. She owed it to the ants.

She walked two blocks away and waited for about twenty minutes. Then she checked to see what she had.

It was a flood. It was a blur, a rush, a swirl, a flood a darkness and color. She had eyes everywhere, she could switch from one to another in a flash. She could see what they saw, and some of them could see through the cameras scattered here and there. Cameras in the lobby, cameras in the halls. A camera in a guy's cybereyes as he got his hundred-nuyen's worth of exertion while the worker beneath him attempted to appear engaged. So many images to choose from—and such a detailed inventory of who was in the joint and what they were doing.

She took another two minutes to make her plan. She had already formed the basics; this was just fine-tuning based on present circumstances.

Then she went in, hands blazing, going room to room, taking the Yakuza foot soldiers there down one by one. Whenever one tried to get the drop on her, she saw him coming long before they got to her.

Cheap in nuyen, costly in time. But the full measure of revenge she was getting was worth the expense.

POSTED BY: NEPHRINE

THE WILDS OF THE MATRIX

Consider a dog. Dogs can be smart, dogs can be loyal, dogs can be wonderful companions, but we have to agree that there are certain limitations on canine intelligence. You would not ask them to repair your commlink. You would not entrust them to drive your car. You would not expect them to cook dinner.

But let's think about that last one for a minute. If you set your dog loose in your kitchen, you wouldn't expect a full meal to come out of it. *Something*, though, is likely to happen, especially if you have the scent of meat somewhere in the kitchen. Things will be turned over. Garbage might be strewn around. Certain fixtures might be damaged. The point is this: The animal might not have the knowledge or skill to use the facility the same way you do, but that does not mean they won't affect the area. Access, not just skill, is critical.

It can be too easy to dismiss technocritters. They don't know what they're doing. They can't manipulate the Matrix the way a skilled hacker would. They are operating on instinct and reflexes, not careful planning and execution. All of that is true—but they're still *there*, so they still must be accounted for.

It should not be surprising that some of the same quirks that have manifested in humans and metahumans have spread to animals, either spontaneously or through deliberate engineering. At their best, technocritters offer the same security benefits to the Matrix that regular critters offer in the meat world, though their relative scarcity means they are sometimes not easily affordable. At their worst, they are elements of chaos, interrupting plans and disrupting activities in unpredictable ways—and we all know times when a little chaos is exactly what is called for.

The first technocritters emerged not long after the appearance of technomancers, so by this point corp labs and university scientists have gained valuable years of experience in training the critters and honing their abilities. The wilds of the Matrix are getting wilder, so we need to scan the latest state of affairs.

WHAT THEY CAN AND CANNOT DO

The most important thing to consider when dealing with technocritters is they should not be thought of as a substitute for a security spider or IC. They can complement people or programs in those roles, but they cannot do all the things they do and should not be thought of as substitutes. They are agents of chaos, the unexpected, the thing that maybe your opponents will forget to watch out for and not necessarily know how to counter. They are also the thing you hope will do more damage to the other side than to you.

The key to understanding how a technocritter is going to interact with the Matrix is to think about them from an evolutionary standpoint. Simply put, how is the Matrix going to help them find food or reproduce? Because if it doesn't help with either of those things, than we're not going to keep seeing instances of that critter.

- That's operating under the assumption that Emergence, whether among humans, metahumans, or animals, is primarily a genetic phenomenon. We do not have enough evidence at this time to say whether that is definitively the case. Emergence may just be a phenomenon of how the Matrix interacts with the world, rather than the next step in evolution.
- KAM

- A fair point, though your last line makes the Matrix too much like mana for my taste.
- Nephrine

The easiest benefit technocritters receive from their Matrix access is enhanced sensory ability. Anyone who has attempted to hack the Matrix knows that while getting into a well-guarded host can be brain-meltingly difficult, gaining access to a lot of the cameras littering the Sixth World can be done in a snap. And critters can be surprisingly good at that sort of thing. Think of the whiskers of a cat—those things are tremendously sensitive, and carnivorous cats can use them to gather information as minute as the direction the hair of their prey is growing in when they make a blind leap at them. (This helps them locate the head, which is always a good thing for a hunter to know.) Animals survive by using their senses to reach out to the world, gather information, and instinctually interpret it to find food and safety. To technocritters, the Matrix is just another sense, and the sound and visual information they gather from it helps them locate themselves and their targets.

- This means that technocritters are more suited to inhabited environments. You find precious few of them away from the Matrix, and the more things they can access, the more advantage they have. They tend to seek out more density—until it gets so dense that their hunting habits or livelihood may be threatened.
- KAM

The second talent technocritters often use to gain an advantage is access. On the simplest level, this is a nezumi or digit triggering a vending machine to drop a sugary treat in an area where they can use it. Or trigger a water cooler to leave a nice puddle for them on the floor. Gifted technocritters can open doors to get into places they're not supposed to be, sometimes invading homes and convincing refrigerators to disgorge the many goodies hidden within.

The Matrix can also be a source of entertainment. Reminiscent of the cats that are their relatives, bastets have been known to let themselves be entranced by the flashing lights of AROs around them. Anyone who has ever attempted to train a bastet knows how difficult it can be to keep them focused.

- They also like to post and watch cute, funny human videos.
- Slamm-0!

All that activity might be a little disruptive at times or might make life interesting if you're being hunted by one of these critters, but it's not enough to cause true online chaos. That's what this last category is for. There are some animals for whom the Matrix—specifically, Matrix combat—can become food. The theorizing on this is still incomplete, but this is how it is believed to work: Scientists have long known of bacteria that can convert electricity to food; at some point in their Emergence, technocritters gain a similar ability. It could be because some such bacteria take up residence in their bodies and generate a symbiotic relationship, where they feed on electricity and generate a waste product that in turn nourishes the technocritter. If the bacteria itself is not present, it could be that Emergence gives a similar functionality to the critter's cells. The main difference here is that rather than feed off electricity, the bacteria or the cells are able to make food from Resonance.

Now, my knowledge gets a little dicey here, so forgive me if some of my explanations are inexact, but this is an area that a lot of scientists have a great deal of uncertainty about. It's clear that, for a technomancer or technocritter, the mere act of accessing the Matrix makes the Resonance interact with the individual, and more intensive acts of Matrix surfing and hacking are usually described in terms of accessing more Resonance. Matrix combat, which involves all sorts of data flowing back and forth communicating intense emotions and physical pain, is a Resonance feast. And if you are a critter that literally feasts on the Resonance, then attacking things in the Matrix is how you make a meal.

Critters that do this are random, ferocious, and close to untrainable. One of the keys to training is providing rewards—something the animal likes. A Resonance-eating technocritter eats just about anything on the Matrix, and it all tastes equally good to it. It's difficult to make it do one action that results in a tasty treat when just about any action it takes, including snapping at the trainer, results in that same tasty treat. So it's likely to tell anyone trying to train it to screw off and just go around snacking on delicious Resonance.

Some corps have attempted to use such critters in a security setting, but it's difficult—give them access to the Matrix, and they're not going to see much reason to stay contained and guard the spot you want them to watch. They will wander where they please, and if the spot they're in seems too calm and devoid of action, they will find another. They are not great hackers by any means, but they are tenacious, and they can eventually rip security protocols to shreds the same way a bored Doberman might turn your sofa into sawdust and small bits of vinyl. There have been some efforts to put them in confined quarters with access to a closed-off host and have them run around on it, but this tends to make them stir crazy. This is bad news for any intruders attempting to access the host, but equally bad news for any friendlies wishing to pull information from the host. It is a technique only to be recommended if the closed network has nothing that anyone needs to look at.

- There are ways to make this work. If they have a decent amount of physical space to wander in—say, a nature preserve—the stir-craziness is mitigated somewhat. Throw them a few wireless-enabled devices to keep them fed, and they stay aggressive but not unstoppably deranged. You can keep them out of whatever closed-off network you have, but if intruders with wireless devices try to cross the preserve, the critters close in and make their lives miserable—while also cutting off their communications.
- Pistons

So that's how technocritters can make your life difficult. How can they help? Depends on if you're quick enough to get out of their way and get them on the scent of someone who is not you. Assuming Resonance signatures have some kind of a scent, which, given the way these critters hunt, seems likely.

- Don't get caught up in the notion that you can put these things on the scent of a target like they're a hound dog or something. In limited circumstances this may work, meaning circumstances where there is only one scent to follow. Which, on the Matrix, is rare. If there is more than one Resonance scent, the critters are indiscriminate. They'll go after whatever they can, and they are not partial to any particular scent—if it smells like food, they'll chase it, only to break off if easier food comes in range.
- Clockwork

THE ARRAY OF TECHNOCRITTERS

Describing technocritters is a difficult task, because they're a lot like technomancers—within a species, they do not have specific physical appearance, or even a common set of physical characteristics to distinguish them. For example, bastets are technocritter cats, but they may be a small, slender Burmese, a burly cougar, or a nimble lynx. Despite the physical variety, within

species the technological abilities of the critters are remarkably similar. With research on technocritters being in the earliest stages, there is no definitive explanation of why this is, but the theory is that it's somehow connected to the other common characteristics of a species, such as cats' nimble bodies and need for a high-meat diet. Whatever the reason, while an encounter between you and a Burmese and you and a cougar may play out differently in real life, online they're remarkably similar.

Note that the skills listed for each critter are in addition to the physical skills for each critter, and Powers and Weaknesses are in addition to any Powers and Weaknesses the critter may have.

AHI

Ahi are Emerged snakes. A wide variety of these critters have been observed—southwestern American rattlers, common garter snakes, Indian cobras, Burmese pythons, and on and on. Their Resonance feeding ability has been confirmed, which explains their fierceness in cybercombat. Given that serpents have an exceptional gift for infiltrating places you don't want them to be, these snakes have seen use in being carried near spots with isolated networks and then set loose to terrorize whoever is logged on. Just make sure you either have a nice Faraday cage for transporting the critter, or you don't plan on using the Matrix while delivering the thing.

For basic snake stats, see p. 42.

W	L	I	C	RES
3		3	1	4
Matrix Skills		Computer 2, Cybercombat 7, Hacking 5, Software 1		
Complex Forms		Diffusion of Firewall, Infusion of Attack, Resonance Spike		
Powers		AR-Parallelism, Resonance Feed, Venomous Code		

BASTET

As mentioned above, bastets (named after the Egyptian goddess) are all varieties of Emerged cat. Whether

it's a cougar jamming the wireless signal of your gun while it pounces at you or a house cat using cameras in the area to know where you are at all times and never let you see it, these things can be all kinds of nuisance. They have been the focus of many training efforts, since regular cats have been trained so many ways, but to date their hunger for Resonance overwhelms any conditioning they receive. On the plus side, smaller versions are especially prone to being distracted by colorful AR or VR phenomena, so that can be one way to get them off your case.

Stats for domestic cats can be found on p. 45; stats for great cats are on p. 402, *SR5*.

W	L	I	C	RES
3	2	4	3	5

Matrix Skills	Computer 4, Cybercombat 4, Hacking 4, Software 4
Complex Forms	Derezz, Diffusion of Attack, Infusion of Sleaze
Powers	AR-Parallelism, Blend, Holographic Concealment, Spraying

DIGIT

Most categories of technocritters are broad, but they're nothing compared to digits. Simply speaking, if a creature has been described as a bug, then it might become a digit. Flies, ants, cockroaches, gnats, and beetles are just the beginning of the list. Since there are more than two hundred million insects for every person on the planet, a reasonable estimate is that there are one or two thousand digits for every person. The trick, of course, is finding your two thousand. You certainly need to find more than one, as an isolated digit can't do much for you, and is certainly not going to listen to any commands you might try to offer. Get a group of them, though, and their e-hive power might cause enough of a disruption for a whole lot of illicit activities.

One of the more annoying abilities of digits is to mess with files—not deliberately, but rather by leaving marks and data holes, similar to the way a termite chews through walls.

Regular insect stats can be found on p. 45 (cockroach) and on p. 47 (spider—and yes, we know spiders are not technically insects, but work with us).

W	L	I	C	RES
2	—	2	—	2

Matrix Skills	Computer 3, Electronic Warfare 3, Hacking 3, Software 2
Complex Forms	Editor, Infusion of Sleaze, Pulse Storm
Powers	AR-Parallelism, E-Hive, Gremlins

FLIPPER

Aquacologies and ocean-going ships have encountered these things, and a handful of them have been captured—though they are decidedly good at escaping. They do not have the aggressive streak of other technocritters, but their mischievousness helps them fill the gap in terms of annoyance. They "swim" through the Matrix much the same as they swim through water, sometimes doing things for no apparent reason other than to see what happens. As you might guess, this has led many aquacologies to engage a variety of security measures to keep them away, but flippers are frustratingly good at defeating whatever measures they put in place. Want to sneak into an aquacology or even a secure port? Find a flipper and follow it.

Regular dolphin stats are on p. 42.

W	L	I	C	RES
4	3	5	4	3

Matrix Skills	Computer 4, Cybercombat 5, Electronic Warfare 2, Hacking 5, Software 3
Complex Forms	Diffusion of Firewall, Editor, Infusion of Sleaze, Tattletale
Powers	AR-Parallelism, Cozenge, Gremlins, Tunnel

FURFUR

Named for a demon generally depicted as a hart, furfur are Emerged deer, elk, and associated animals. While deer are often portrayed as gentle, vegetarian creatures, an appetite for Resonance brings out the most aggressive side of these creatures, the side you see in nature documentaries when they are swinging antlers at each other with their full force. They have not become carnivorous, but the ferocious joy they take in Matrix attacks has carried to the physical world. That is to say, just because they don't want to eat you doesn't mean they won't kill you.

Deer have not been statted up elsewhere, so physical stats are also included here.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	RES
5	4	5	4	3	1	3	3	2	6	4

Initiative	8 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x6/+6
Condition Monitor	11/10
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 3, Social 5
Armor	0
Physical Skills	Perception 4, Running 4, Tracking 2, Unarmed Combat 3
Matrix Skills	Computer 4, Cybercombat 5, Electronic Warfare 3, Software 2
Complex Forms	Infusion of Attack, Infusion of Sleaze, Pulse Storm
Powers	AR-Parallelism, Blend, Natural Weapon (Antlers: DV (STR+1) P, AP –1), Enhanced Sense (Smell), Resonance Feed

LIBERTINE

Most shadowrunners in North America have spent at least a handful of nights sleeping under the stars (or under the acidic clouds concealing the stars from view), and it usually only takes one or two such nights to teach you about the menaces that are raccoons. They dig through anything not protected, get into things they are not supposed to, and otherwise disrupt whatever order people attempt to impose on their surroundings. Libertines are Awakened raccoons, and they treat the Matrix the same way they treat the physical world. They disrupt things, turn them over, leave claw marks in annoying places, and so on. They generally are not hostile and do not directly attack other personas, but they can still cause disruption and annoyance. When you are trying to get out of a hairy situation through a backdoor you left for just such emergencies, only to find out that the coding has been so scrambled that you can't even get it to budge, then you'll know how annoying libertines can be.

Standard raccoon stats are on p. 46.

W	L	I	C	RES
3	1	4	2	3

Matrix Skills	Computer 3, Hacking 5, Software 7
Complex Forms	Diffusion of Data Processing, Editor, Static Bomb
Powers	AR-Parallelism, Blend, Gremlins, Tunnel

MONGREL

As Emerged canines, mongrels are the other technocritters besides bastets that are the focus of the most intensive training efforts. Mongrels are gifted at sniffing out personas and icons that would prefer to remain hidden, and plenty of hackers want to put those skills to their service. So far, though, mongrels are generally resistant to pursuing anyone's will other than their own, though that hasn't stopped people from attempting to form long-term relationships with the critters in the hopes that a partnership will develop. Some hackers call these critters "lassies," partly out of the fond hope that they might eventually be at their beck and call. They are capable of feeding with Resonance, though there are decidedly different levels of aggression from different examples of the breed—domestic dogs that are mongrels are more friendly and less eager to attack, while those that are wolves or coyotes are more willing to snack on some tasty Resonance, and they are considerably more aggressive than their mundane counterparts.

Regular dog stats can be found on p. 402, *SR5*.

W	L	I	C	RES
2	2	4	2	3

Matrix Skills	Computer 7, Electronic Warfare 5, Software 3
Complex Forms	Diffusion of Sleaze, Infusion of Data Processing
Powers	Resonance Feed

NEZUMI

More intelligent than digits but better able to squeeze into small places than libertines, nezumi are Emerged rats and mice who do not feed off Resonance and are thus always looking for other food their abilities can provide. They are gifted at finding food, no matter how encased in machinery it may be, freeing it from its confines, and devouring it. They are even less trainable than most technocritters, but some intrepid shadowrunners have taken to capturing one, setting it loose in a corporate break room, hotel guest floor, or some other spot with a decent supply of vending machines, then trailing after them and scooping up all the goodies they manage to release.

Rat stats are on p. 46.

W	L	I	C	RES
2	1	2	1	3

Matrix Skills	Computer 3, Electronic Warfare 3, Hacking 4, Hardware 2, Software 2
Complex Forms	Diffusion of Firewall, Static Bomb
Powers	AR-Parallelism, Cozenge, Gremlins, Tunnel

ROOK

This category includes a wide variety of birds, such as crows, ravens, jackdaws, jays, and magpies. Those are the well-known ones. On top of that, people have reported blackbirds, gulls, and possibly most alarmingly, falcons displaying Emergent abilities. As you might guess, these critters love shiny objects, whether they're in the physical world or virtual. That means that while finding these things may not be easy, once you have one in your sights, attracting it is not too difficult. Be aware, though, that they do not feed on Resonance, so they are more likely to look at people and their personas as a threat rather than an invitation. If you want them to swoop into a particular spot, you need to be either disguised or not there.

Stats for regular crows are on p. 45.

W	L	I	C	RES
2	1	3	—	3

Matrix Skills	Computer 3, Hacking 4, Software 5
Complex Forms	Infusion of Sleaze
Powers	AR-Parallelism, E-Hive, Gremlins

GAME INFORMATION

USING TECHNOCRITTERS

Technocritters do not see the Matrix as a separate realm from the physical world. It is a place to explore and may help them find food, just like any other place. They have little perception of self, which means they are not self-conscious enough about their appearance to change the way they appear on the Matrix. That means that on the Matrix, they look like they do on the physical world, through certain scars or other flaws may not appear on the persona.

The stats presented here are the basic stats for technocritters, but there is a degree of variance, since so many different types of animals can be represented in each critter description. Gamemasters may adjust stats up or down to represent different individual critters, but generally the adjustment should be by no more than 1 in either direction.

While technocritters use their Logic as their Data Processing rating, they make their Matrix-based tests with Intuition instead of Logic. They are not carefully parsing code and breaking down systems; rather, they are hunting by instinct and their abilities mean their instincts can sometimes get them into places that human or metahuman logic can't penetrate. They also defend with Intuition instead of Logic, because their reaction to possible threats is very instinctive.

Their intuitive nature should be reflected in how they interact with others. They are generally not organized or dedicated in their attack. They want to eat, but they primarily want to survive. If they think their efforts to get food will cost their life, they will almost always let discretion be the better part of valor.

TECHNOCRITTER STATS

The physical stats and skills used for a technocritter are the same as their base animal type; that type, and a reference for where to find those stats, are listed in the description of each critter. Their other stats are the basis of their living persona, as described on p. 250, *SR5*. Remember to translate their attributes as follows

CRITTER ATTRIBUTE	MATRIX RATING
Resonance	Device Rating
Charisma	Attack
Intuition	Sleaze
Logic	Data Processing
Willpower	Firewall

TECHNOCRITTER SUBMERSION

This is simple: They don't submerge. Their Resonance can never exceed their Essence.

TECHNOCRITTERS AND SPRITES

Almost as simple as the submersion rule, in that technocritters do not summon sprites. They may eat them, though.

TECHNOCRITTER POWERS

See the **Game Information** chapter for a description of Emergent critter powers.

PROTOSAPIENTS

Fletcher Bissell strolled deliberately across the muddy mining town streets as a slow drizzle of 0s and 1s plopped on the brim of his hat. Sometimes his feet splashed in puddles; sometimes they made no sound other than an oddly distant sizzle.

He pulled the brim lower on his brow. Water ran down the sides into a fall in front of his face. It blocked his vision, but there was not much to see. It also blocked his face, but again, there was little there.

No lights shone in upper rooms of buildings along the main street. No one else was in town. One last bit of light crept through the western clouds, the only thing preventing total darkness.

That wouldn't do. Bissell reached his hand up and made a single twisting motion, like he was screwing in a light bulb. A glow appeared about ten meters over his head—not very bright, but better than nothing. It moved with him.

He strolled to the edge of town and toward the large cattle pen that would have truly stunk up the town if the programmers had been foolish enough to include realistic odor effects. He walked up to the fence, put his right foot up on the lowest rail, and leaned on the top. The glow over his head stopped short of the pen, but close enough to reveal twisting dark tentacles reaching out from unidentifiable dark masses. Bissell watched casually, but the critters did not seem to care about him. They were too busy disintegrating reality beneath them.

He stood up, took two steps backward, and placed two fingers in his mouth. He took a deep breath and let loose a piercing whistle that would have shattered any crystal within one hundred meters. The critters didn't react quickly, but they did react. The squirming became more focused, and they moved toward Bissell.

The fence was, in truth, no obstacle. Tentacles pulled it to shreds as they came close to it, and the black mass surged forward, reaching to claim Bissell. He did not move backward, or do anything that required speed. He watched the darkness come, reached toward his waist, and slowly pulled out a revolver with a barrel that seemed far too long for his hip holster. He lifted it up, opened the cylinder, gave it a quick spin to make sure he was fully loaded, closed it, then raised the gun close to his right eye. It wasn't hard to get the blackness in his sights, because it was practically on top of him. Tentacles were brushing his feet as they reached to claim him. He squinted, adjusted the gun slightly down, and squinted harder. Then he fired. Once. Paused. Fired again. Waited briefly. Then fired two shots in what was, for him, rapid sequence.

The first round sent it back squealing. The second made it quiver in pain. The double tap hit it like a shotgun blast hitting a scarecrow, and the thing hurled backwards as it was somehow shredded to bits.

Bissell slowly blew on the end of his barrel. The whole point of choosing the right weapon, he firmly believed, was making it unnecessary to be fast on the draw.

POSTED BY: GLITCH

THE UNTAMED WILDERNESS

Satellites have photographed every square centimeter of this planet multiple times. Surveillance planes have crossed back and forth over every part of the globe. The whole planet has been seen and photographed. Are there hidden parts—secret caverns and the like? Of course. There is not, however, any real frontier. Every time you are wandering through a deep forest or desolate desert, you may feel like you are setting foot where no sentient being has been before, but you are wrong.

Unless you are on the Matrix. While it's true that the entirety of the Matrix is fabricated by human and metahuman hands (setting aside the Foundation, since it is more abstract than I want to be at the moment), all we are doing are manufacturing the tools and the space that can be used to build a world—or more accurately, a wilderness. We have unleashed millions of agents, automated routines, and other processes that shape the Matrix without us having to sculpt every detail. Not to mention the AIs we have programmed and then set loose to program other things and develop personalities that will allow them to accomplish tasks the programmers could

not have envisioned, making a world we are practically guaranteed not to understand. By design, these beings will develop parts of the Matrix that are completely foreign to us, unexplored and unknown.

- Only in the same sense that the Americas were unexplored before Europeans arrived. Those lands were, of course, neither unexplored nor uninhabited, but the European explorers and colonizers managed to convince themselves that the explorations of people who were not them didn't count.
- Puck

- Maybe, but some of these programs and spawning routines keep spinning out designs without sentience, so it is likely there are many truly unexplored areas out there.
- Pistons

- Not to mention the vast chaos that is the Resonance realms.
- Netcat

The Matrix is everything that explorers have talked about and glorified. When we dive into its uncharted corners, we follow Mark Twain's advice to "Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover." The frontier is there and all of us (except the most Luddite hermits) have almost immediate access to it. If we're brave enough to go out and look.

Like the wilderness of yore, the Matrix is not simply exotic plants swaying in a gentle breeze. There are critters out there, wild and untamed. And they will mess up your day.

There are a few critical things to know about the beasts of the untamed wild.

- **They reproduce:** Self-replicating code, or quines, have existed since the late twentieth century, and the ability of (and reasons for) them to reproduce has multiplied significantly since then. On top of that, there is an advantage for agents and the like to adopt code and routines from other Matrix entities, so they reproduce without making exact copies of themselves. This results in gibberish code at a much higher rate than human, animal, or even insect births, but still new versions of the critter, or even totally new species, may emerge.

- **They maintain a consistent online appearance:** We are all, of course, familiar with theories of quantum mechanics stating that much of what we perceive as reality has to do with our expectations of it rather than the true essence of its structure.

- We are?
- Matt Wrath

In some versions of this theory, this extends to yourself; you have a perception of how you fit into the environment around you, so that helps determine some of how you appear to the world (setting aside the actual work you do to dress and style yourself).

The same holds true for protosapients in the Matrix. The Matrix is their reality, and they see others of their kind around them, and occasionally they see themselves, and that shapes their perception of who they are and how they fit into the world. So they keep that shape, for the simple reason that they are unable to comprehend themselves as having any other shape. The shape is part of their reality, so it is as consistent as their existence.

- **They eat the Matrix:** Protosapients feed on raw code. We don't know why. It's not the same as with technocritters, who have flesh-and-blood bodies that they need to nourish. Protosapients can live as long as there is a Matrix to hold them; even if there is another Crash, they have a chance to write themselves into a nice, safe space and survive even that. It might seem like they would have no need to eat, but that is a misunderstanding of what matters in the life of a Matrix critter.

  Think about your normal routine. Wake up, grab the 'link, check for messages, check for updates. You do that last thing every day because

there is something or other always updates. A program gets new features, more functionality, more bugs, and it comes to you in seconds.

- "Check for updates"? Wait, Glitch doesn't do automatic updates?
- Slamm-0!

- Nothing interferes with code in my possession without my review and consent.
- Glitch

Programs are updated regularly to make sure they keep up with bleeding-edge standards, to make AR representations as glossy as possible, to give you the bells and whistles you expect, that sort of thing. And that's great for the programs that have developers and coders actively working on them, but plenty of pieces of software hit a point where there is no commercially justifiable reason to keep updating them, so the updates stop, and the program essentially dies. Yeah, it still functions, but from the day development stops, it slowly recedes into the past until obsolescence claims it.

Protosapients may not always know much, but they know they don't want that. Nobody is responsible for updating them, so they have to take care of it themselves. They do this by mungeing code—chewing it up, letting their inner processes examine it, then spewing it out. Like pretty much any digestive process, the stuff they put out is unrecognizable from what they took in, but they manage to get what they need from it.

This is hard on the Matrix, though, which means areas mungeing protosapients regularly inhabit quickly become horribly buggy messes. Don't wander into one of their domains and expect the Matrix to work right.

- **They are more unpredictable than you think:** One thing about life that amazes me is that everyone alive (with some exceptions of Frosty's acquaintance) has had the Matrix around them their whole lives, yet they still expect the execution of electronic code to be predictable and linear. If it works once, it should work all the time, in exactly the same fashion. If a program or device performs a certain series of actions when given a particular set of commands, it should always do those exact same actions with the exact same commands. They expect this, even though the first thing they do when a program crashes is immediately reload it and expect it to work properly and not crash in exactly the same fashion.

  And you know what? It usually does. Unless it is written by a complete amateur or fatally flawed, code is adaptable. It doesn't want to crash, so it does everything in its power not to crash. Similarly, advanced code very much wants (in a programmed way, but isn't that the same way any of us want anything?) to achieve whatever its task is, and it can be surprisingly adaptable in what it will do to make that happen.

  The simple point is this: Don't fall into the trap of thinking that if you observe protosapients long enough, you'll see what they are programmed to do, and they subsequently won't vary from the program. You'll be wrong, and you'll pay a higher price for it than you think.

So in case you didn't think you had enough to worry about while wandering the Matrix, you now have more. But what kind of explorers would we be if we didn't run the risk of something leaping at us from their hiding place and biting our heads off?

BEASTS OF NOWHERE

Protosapients function similarly to artificial intelligence characters (p. 145, *Data Trails*) and use some of the same qualities. Since they have no physical bodies, they do not have physical attributes or skills. Protosapients, being somewhat less than sapient, tend to have low Logic, making them extremely difficult to train.

As with technocritters, protosapients stats form the basis of their living persona (see p. 149). Unlike technocritters, protosapients use programs rather than complex forms. Note that protosapients cannot attempt Emulation (p. 152, *Data Trails*), but they must undergo restoration and realignment (p. 156, *Data Trails*). They also have two different condition monitors like AIs do, Matrix Damage and Core Damage (p. 154, *Data Trails*) The Matrix Condition Monitor is tied to the device it is currently on and is (8 + [Device Rating / 2, rounded up]); if the protosapient is not on a device, it does not have this condition monitor. Core Condition Monitor is (8 + [Depth / 2, rounded up]) and is listed with each critter.

CYBERWEREWOLF

There is perhaps no single word that has more of the essence of the Sixth World in it than "cyberwerewolf," which manages to combine technology, magic, and terror in thirteen letters. Its appearance is just as intimidating, being a large, two-headed wolf that gets angrier the closer you get. It is extremely territorial, anxious to attack anything in its area that is not itself or another wolf. Formerly it was confined to wireless-capable cyber devices, but there have been reports of it moving into hosts of cyberware manufacturers. What happens

after it feels comfortable extending its range is anyone's guess.

W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	DEPTH
5	2	5	3	4	6	4

Condition Monitor	10
Matrix Skills	Computer 3, Cybercombat 5, Electronic Warfare 4, Hacking 4
Qualities	Inherent Program (Decryption), Munge, Real World Naïveté
Programs	Armor, Fork, Stealth, Tantrum

DAEMON

The good news about daemons is that they don't munge unless they get really hungry, so the area around their inhabitation tends to be relatively free of corruption. The bad news is that that's the only good news. They don't eat the data around them because they try to get their fill on the code of the personas they attack and defeat. They are big, strong, aggressive, and eager to attack anything that comes into range. They like to hide, wait for prey to approach, and spring out.

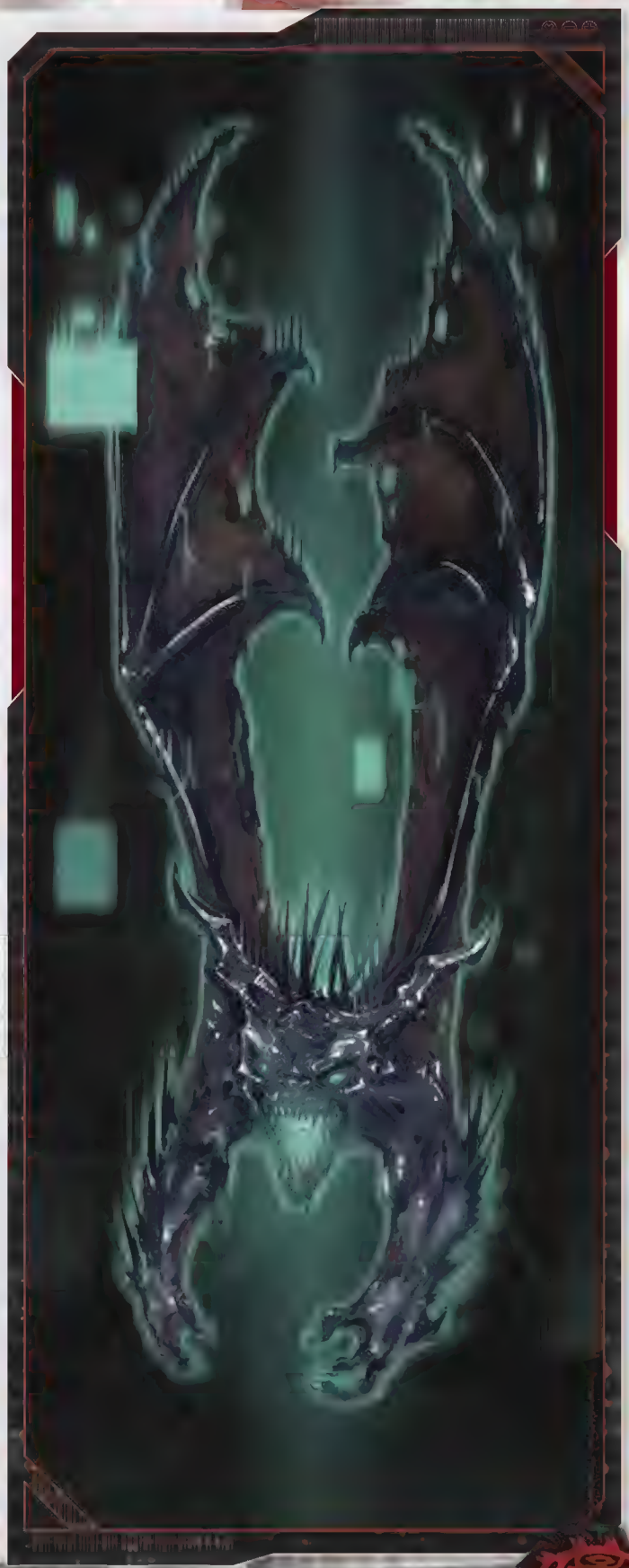
Appropriately, they look like traditional demons, with wings, horns, burly arms and legs, but missing one thing—a torso. Sadly, that lack of bulk makes it easier for them to hide. Added to their hiding abilities is the fact that they are grey or black in color, with no demon red to be found.

W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	DEPTH
4	2	6	3	3	6	6

Condition Monitor	11
Matrix Skills	Computer 3, Cybercombat 5, Electronic Warfare 3, Hacking 3, Intimidation 3
Qualities	Inherent Program (Decryption), Munge, Real World Naïveté
Programs	Armor, Cascade, Fork, Stealth, Tantrum

FROBNITZ

Absolutely the worst. While the daemon and yantra and their ilk let you know something is wrong right away by their appearance, the frobnitz appears like a regular metahuman icon. They may seem a little less detailed than other icons, and their movements may seem a little alien (though perfectly smooth, from a graphics standpoint), but there is little initially to show that there is anything awry in them. Right up until their eyes bulge, their jaw opens extra wide, and they start shoving data into it. The effect of watching them go from innocent bystander to horrific eater has made more than one Matrix user swear off VR for life. They are fond of mungeing sprites, making them particularly loathed by technomancers.



W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	DEPTH
3	3	4	4	5	6	5

Condition Monitor	11
Matrix Skills	Computer 4, Cybercombat 8, Hacking 4,
Qualities	Inherent Program (Stealth), Munge, Real World Naïveté, Snooper
Programs	Cat's Paw, Exploit, Guard, Mugger, Poke

GRUE

This is the terror that waits in the dark. The unlucky few who have encountered grues in the Matrix have trouble describing them—usually they talk about darkness and tentacles, and the rest is vague. They have the most powerful attack of any protosapient and are more than able to mess up a Matrix run. Sometimes security spiders fantasize about having a grue as part of their security layout, but no one, not even elite GOD agents, wants to get close enough to capture one.

W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	DEPTH
5	2	6	2	5	6	6

Condition Monitor	11
Matrix Skills	Computer 5, Cybercombat 8, Hacking 4
Qualities	Inherent Program (Hammer), Munge, Real World Naïveté
Programs	Armor, Cascade, Decryption, Fnord, Mugger, Poke

HEAVYWEIGHT

This is a munge machine, nothing more and nothing less. It doesn't stay in any one particular area; instead, it wanders from place to place, mungeing wherever it goes. These things are so destructive that at the behest of the Big Ten, the Grid Overwatch Division has initiated a Heavyweight Inventory and Tracking Operation (HITO) to mark any heavyweights they can find and make sure they do not get into corporate areas. They destroy some of the heavyweights they encounter but not all of them—sometimes they don't want to take the risk of direct combat, and they just hope the things will

move on. Other times, they want to preserve the critters and track them, in case they need to point them in a direction where they can create desirable havoc.

Heavyweights look like a large armored van with oddly thin legs growing out from its body and a large, hungry mouth on the front end.

W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	DEPTH
6	1	3	2	4	6	1

Condition Monitor	8
Matrix Skills	Computer 3, Cybercombat 5, Hacking 3, Intimidation 5
Qualities	Corrupter, Inherent Program (Toolbox), Munge, Real World Naïveté
Programs	Armor, Fork, Tantrum

SINTAX

There are theories that protosapients are a dark mirror of human activities on the Matrix, and whenever this theory is discussed, the SINtax is mentioned. The critter looks like a weirdly distorted corporate suit, with joints that are not where they should be and that bend the wrong direction. When you see them, they appear as a grotesque parody of someone browsing the Matrix, shifting here and there in herky-jerky fashion, not really focusing on anything, moving with no apparent rhyme or reason, then plunging in to eat when they feel like it. If the dark-mirror theory is correct, parts of the Matrix see us as beings of little meaning and random destruction, and there are days I have trouble arguing against the view.

They are not the most aggressive or damaging of critters, but they seem to have a dispiriting effect on any devices they wander into, making them more vulnerable.

W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	DEPTH
2	1	2	3	3	6	3

Condition Monitor	8
Matrix Skills	Computer 2, Hacking 3, Software 2
Qualities	Easily Exploitable, Inherent Program (Browse), Munge, Real World Naïveté
Programs	Cat's Paw, Fnord, Guard, Sneak, Stealth

TENTACLE

These things are capable of making the Matrix look like a Dali painting. They prefer to feed on icons, meaning areas where they are active can be filled with distorted bodies, twisted faces, and gnarled limbs, like the toys in the bedroom of a sadistic child. Often they stop their feeding at icons, but if they get into a frenzy they might do enough damage to make accessing their particular area difficult. If not crashing it altogether.

True to their name, the tentacle is a single long, dark, flexible limb that sometimes wraps icons and some-

times pushes into noses, mouths, and ears, which is uncomfortable even if you don't have simsense.

W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	DEPTH
4	1	3	3	2	6	2

Condition Monitor	
Matrix Skills	Computer 3, Cybercombat 3, Hacking 2
Qualities	Inherent Program (Decryption), Munge, Real World Naïveté
Programs	Fork, Stealth, Tantrum

YANTRA

The sight of these things is disconcerting enough—a hovering black or white brain with fifty-five—no more, no less—short tentacles helping it move forward. Unlike some other protosapients, which favor abandoned corners of the Matrix, yantras like to be where there are plenty of files to munge, making them the bane of data archivists everywhere. They are especially fond of mungeing defused data bombs, and once they have eaten enough they learn how to make their own. So yes, they're hungry file munchers who might slip into your precious database and blow it all up. Watch out.

W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS	DEPTH
5	3	4	4	4	6	5

Condition Monitor	
Matrix Skills	Computer 4, Hacking 3, Software 2
Qualities	Inherent Program (Demolition), Munge, Real World Naïveté, Redundancy
Programs	Armor, Exploit

PROTOSAPIENT QUALITIES

These are qualities from *Data Trails* that are used by protosapients.

CORRUPTER

Protosapients with the Corrupter negative quality suffered fundamental defects to their programming during their evolution. The critter has an unfortunate tendency to trigger malfunctions in other programs with which it interacts. Treat this as if the protosapient has the Gremlins quality (p. 81, *SR5*) at Level 2. The gamemaster should also make use of this quality for dramatic effect as best suits the story.

EASILY EXPLOITABLE

This protosapient has a massive flaw in its code that actually weakens the security of any device it runs on. The dice penalty for placing multiple marks on the device holding the protosapient is reduced to -3 for two marks and -6 for three marks. This reduced penalty is apparent to any persona before the attempt to mark the device is made.

INHERENT PROGRAM

Protosapients tend to evolve from a specific cyberprogram, and they do not lose the functionality of that program. Inherent programs don't require an empty program slot, other than the one the protosapient is currently occupying, and are considered to be running at all times. An inherent program is deeply intertwined with the core programming of the protosapient and cannot be crashed with the Crash Program action.

MUNGE

Protosapients eat code to upgrade and maintain their own coding structure. This process is called mungeing (pronounced "munj-ing"). When a protosapient munges data, it leaves behind random data that usually destroys or distorts whatever is being munged. For example, a munged icon might look like an indistinct mess, while a munged program would become either buggy or completely unusable. Protosapients have simple code in their cores and can drain Essence from any type of data that they find.

Mungeing a piece of data to drain a point of Essence takes a Charisma + Depth ([10 - Attack)], 1 minute) Extended Test. If the critter is interrupted during this process, the data remains intact and the Essence is not drained. To munge a file, the protosapient must have access to it. To munge a program, the protosapient must be in either the same host in which the program is running or the same grid as the persona that is running the program. Any non-sapient program, icon, or file has 1 Essence for a protosapient to drain. Sprites have an amount of Essence equal to their Level.

The gamemaster determines the extent of the damage caused by mungeing data using the following guidelines: An Agent/Pilot program or skill/know/activesoft should have its rating decreased by the Depth of the mungeing critter. If this causes the munged software to reach a rating of zero, the software is totally destroyed. The same goes for a munged sprite's Level. The gamemaster may impose a threshold equal to the mungeing critter's Depth to read a file with a Matrix Perception Test. Icons may become twisted and corrupted, making them less identifiable, or at the very least more disturbing.

For every point of Essence lost by a protosapient it also permanently loses one point of Depth, down to a minimum of 1, as well as a program (chosen at random)

that can never be regained. If a target critter's Essence is drained to 0, the critter dies. A protosapient can only increase its Essence to twice its natural maximum. Any Essence drained beyond this point is lost; the critter's core can only hold so much at a time.

REAL WORD NAÏVETÉ

As creatures of the Matrix (and critters of limited understanding), protosapients are at best ignorant of the defining aspects of the physical world; things like gravity, friction, and inertia have no meaning to them. if their original programming involved interaction with the physical world in some way, they may not fully grasp the entirety of it. As a result, protosapients have little knowledge of the real world and may suffer hefty negative dice pool modifiers (at the gamemaster's discretion) when interacting with it or otherwise exercising knowledge about it.

REDUNDANCY

Essential algorithms, routines, and other program structures are multiplied in the core of the protosapient, making it harder to kill. The AI gets 2 additional boxes on its Core Condition Monitor.

SNOOPER

The protosapient is more effective at accessing and manipulating communication streams. It receives a +2 dice pool modifier when making Snoop and Jam Signal tests.

PROTOSAPIENT PROGRAMS

Protosapients make use of the programs from *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition* (p. 245) as well as some programs from *Data Trails*. Programs from that later group are listed below; advanced programs have prerequisites included in the listing. Note that advanced programs also require a certain number of marks on their target to operate, which is listed in the program description.

CASCADE

Prerequisite: Decryption **Marks Required:** 2

A protosapient with this advanced program is able to quickly analyze its failures, correct itself, and then exploit an enemy's weak points. Any time a critter with this program running fails an Attack action against a sufficiently marked icon, it gains a +1 dice pool bonus on future Attack tests against that target. This bonus can stack up a number of times equal to the critter's Depth. If the program is quit at any time, all accumulated bonuses vanish. They also vanish after twenty-four hours, as targets make adjustments and the old information becomes invalid.

CAT'S PAW

A low-offensive attack program that distracts the user instead of damaging the device he is using, Cat's Paw is useful to prevent a user from performing Matrix actions while not bricking the device they may be using. This program fills the AR display or VR experience with annoying errors, spam pop-ups and pop-unders, or other distracting garbage. On a successful Data Spike action (p. 239, *SR5*), instead of doing damage, the program generates a negative dice pool modifier equal to two plus the number of marks the user has on his target. Marks added or removed after using Cat's Paw will also modify the penalty accordingly.

FNORD

Prerequisite: Sneak **Marks Required:** 1

A protosapient can use this program to stay hidden from certain entities in the Matrix. Any marked non-sapient entity—agent, IC, technocritter, or feral AI—that fails to garner any net hits against a protosapient with the Fnord program on its first Matrix Perception Test cannot perform any further Matrix Perception Tests against the critter for as long as it remains in that host or on that grid. This can only be used a number of times equal to the protosapient's Depth. Once exhausted, the AI must first realign (p. 156, *Data Trails*) to use this program again. If a security spider or other IC icon marks the AI, no Matrix Perception Test is required, and the AI is automatically spotted.

POKE

Prerequisite: Exploit **Marks Required:** 1

The Poke program helps provide access to the low-level memory of a device. For each successful Opposed Test made against a target device's Firewall, the AI receives a cumulative +1 dice pool bonus to Crash Program actions against the target. This bonus can stack up a number of times equal to the AI's Depth. If the program is quit at any time, all accumulated bonuses vanish.

TANTRUM

This program overlays cold simsense sensations on top of a Data Spike action, hitting the target with a quick and disgusting sensation if even a single box of Matrix Damage is scored. The program is effective against all technomancers, as well as cold sim or hot sim deckers, but it does nothing to users working in the Matrix in AR, any form of IC, and agents. The program does no damage from the Data Spike; instead, the targeted user experiences Nausea (p. 409, *SR5*) for three Combat Turns due to the sensory input. Popular options this program uses to make targets feel queasy include the smell of a dirty diaper or the feeling of being punched in the junk.

DRAKES

The damn soykaf was cold. Again. Ezzie Cardon stared at the machine, hoping the force of her anger could warm up the liquid inside. It didn't.

She dumped the mug she had just poured, then pulled on the tap again. Maybe she had just gotten a bad batch?

Nope. Second one was cold too.

She slammed her mug on the counter in front of the machine and walked away. She tried not to look too relieved that she hadn't actually broken it—the corp charged, like, fifty nuyen for a broken mug. She had no idea where they were getting their mugs, but she kept thinking she should introduce them to a cheaper supplier.

So for now, no soykaf. She'd have to push through the afternoon weariness and lack of motivation on her own.

She pulled open the door of the cafeteria, walked through, then pivoted quickly. She'd left her 'link sitting on a table near the soykaf machine. She darted back toward it and heard a ripping sound. She closed her eyes, muttered to herself, and looked down.

The front of her skirt looked okay. Maybe a little oddly saggy, but intact. She felt around the back and ...

Underwear. She was feeling underwear. Her pivot had caught her skirt on the door handle and ripped a nice, large hole in it.

Dammit. She walked quickly. She had no time to do anything about this, not with eight compliance reports due in six hours. She walked to the table, grabbed her 'link, then turned back to the door.

To see Kevin Baldwin standing there, smirking.

"Geez, Cardon. Next time you spend a night in the gutter, maybe clean yourself up a little before you come to work."

"I didn't ... it's ripped. It just ripped, okay?"

"Sure it did. I'm sure it has nothing to do with your desperation to show off your ass to anyone lonely enough to give it a second look."

"Shut up, Kevin."

"Hey, hey, calm down. It's actually not that bad of an ass, really. I mean, I'm sure you got some cellulite going on under there, but as long as you keep it covered, it's not terrible. Think you can keep at least a little fabric on top of it?"

She was at the door now. Kevin was standing in front of it.

"Excuse me," she said.

"Now for me, the ass show wouldn't work," he said while not moving. "I'm more of a breast man. The next time you want to put on a show, maybe you could ..."

The rest was unclear. There was a roar, or maybe two roars, once from inside Ezzie, one from outside. She had a sudden crippling pain her her forehead, like her entire skull was pulling apart. She fell forward and landed on all fours. At least she thought she did, but it felt okay—balanced, smooth, not awkward. She yelled something at Kevin, and it came out full of fire and pain. She didn't know if he responded. She didn't know much of what happened.

A few minutes later, she was blinking at a room filled with charred wood and melting plastic. There were distant screams. Kevin was lying on the floor in front of her, the right side of his face blackened, with some bone showing under the flaked-off skin.

And the soykaf was now quite warm.

POSTED BY: PLAN 10

- Fragging dragons, right? It's impossible to learn a goddamn thing about them. Drakes, more so. They're rare, and the wizworms want them kept secret, so it's nearly impossible to find anything out about them. Frosty, as always, knows a bit, but again, as always, isn't willing to give up everything she knows. So we asked someone still working for our full approval, someone who has the knowledge ... somehow. The source may be unlikely, but the information is good.
- Glitch

The advice given to all newbie shadowrunners makes it difficult at best for a dragon to directly hire elite disposable assets. Sometimes, work needs done that can't be assigned to metahuman cutouts hiring whoever looks dangerous at the bar tonight. This isn't a recent development—it dates back to at least the Fourth World, if not earlier. For these situations, drakes exist.

That was the plan, anyway. That was always the plan. It's rarely worked one hundred percent. Drakes are metahumans who can transform into a metahuman-sized dragons and use the powers of whatever dracoform they assume. In past eras, even as recently as the early parts of this decade, the true origins of *homo sapiens draco* were shrouded in mystery ... or at least, that was the intention. Everyone who thinks about it for half a second is well aware that drakes' existence is the result of some scheme or another by dragonkind, and they're more likely than not pawns of one wyrm or another.

Exactly how drakes are created is a mystery, possibly because it would kill dragonkind to just be straight about anything. The obvious assumption is that that dragon genetics are introduced into metahuman stock the old-fashioned way, but we have no indication that this kind of cross-breeding would result in viable offspring. The next-best theory is some kind of magic ritual, which is more in line with what's known about the wizworms. Nobody really knows. One solid fact is that a metahuman can't be made into a drake—it's something you're born with. Take a second to consider what drakes are and the fact that they're almost exclusively seen working for dragons or dragon assets, and we can say for sure that the dragons are behind it. We just don't know the mechanism.

It's not often that the whatever-they-do works, but when it does, you have a metahuman with some of a dragon's powers and natural superiority over baseline metahumans in one respect or another. Unlike dragons, not all drakes are Awakened. There are drake mages, sure, but there are also drake deckers, con-men, muscle, and even cybered-up drake street samurai. Having dragon powers doesn't limit metahumanity's potential, which is the point of using them to create catspaws and right-hand men and women.

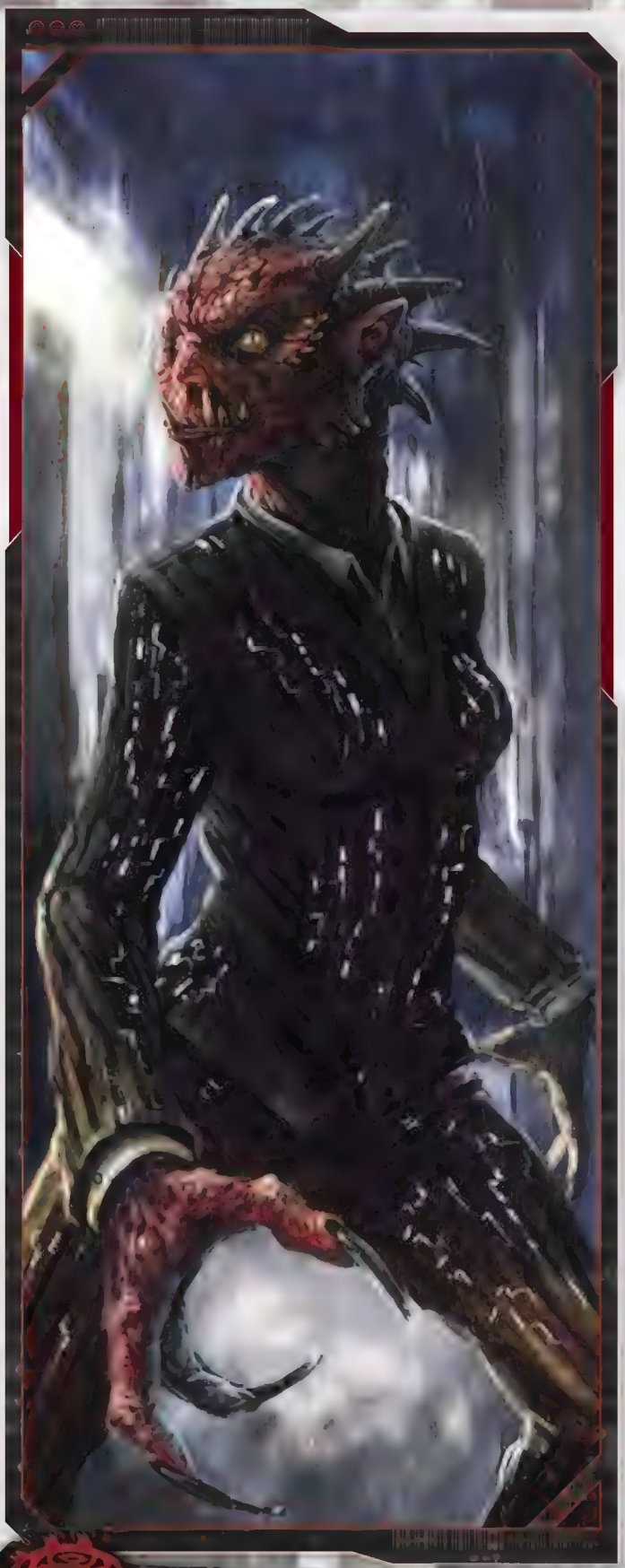
The problem with not limiting drakes? They get away. Metahumans can't get enough of that freedom stuff and chafe under the thumb of their dragon masters, no matter what wiz powers they get out of the deal. Parents of would-be drakes often try to smuggle their children out of the sight of whatever dragon is behind their transformation, and when the patron/parent dragon isn't in desperate need of an agent twenty or thirty years down the line, they sometimes succeed. The keyword is "sometimes." Drakes will most often be found in the service of their dragon masters, and one that isn't under a dragon's thumb is quite rare.

- Has anyone ever actually met a drake that wasn't working for one dragon or another?
- Tolstoi

- They exist. You're more likely to meet a Mr. Johnson you can trust than a free drake, but there are at least a handful out there, and the dragons generally leave them alone, if only to avoid conflict with their peers over who they belong to. Trick is, if their dragon patron ever finds conclusive proof that a free drake was their doing, they *will* try to get their investment back.
- Frosty

- Investment?
- Respec

- I've said all I'm willing to say. Check my post further down.
- Frosty



- Speaking of which ... Frosty, I can understand. But Plan 10? How does an AI fragment know so much about drakes? What database has it looked at?
- Bull

Drakes with dragon masters are the more common (though using the word "common" to describe any dracoform is a bad joke), if only because—well, let's see *you* outsmart a dragon.

DRAKES IN THE THRALL OF DRAGONS

These poor sods wind up growing up more as a dragon, or even a dragon's property, than a person. Their dracoform is unlocked early, and the patron or one of their servants trains them extensively while instilling in them that she is to serve her patron before anybody else. They spend their childhood and teenage years being molded into whatever tool their patron thinks will be useful when reaching adulthood. Some of them are even forced to get cybered up. Cyberware disappears in the dracoform, but it makes them more useful in their metahuman form. Oh, on that topic: We're still learning about drakes. Five years ago, we were sure all drakes were magic by definition.

If you get too deeply involved in a dragon's affairs, my condolences. You'll probably come face to face with a drake or two in service of whatever wizworm you managed to piss off. Do not fuck with drakes who work with dragons. They're taught a lot of things growing up, but empathy is not one of them. They don't want to be metahuman, so don't treat them that way.

Drakes have been observed with every potential dracoform, from feathered serpents to your bog-standard western dragon, all human-sized. Which, personally, I'm thankful for, because this is confusing enough without also explaining where the several hundred kilos of mass that a full-size dragon has on a metahuman would come from. There are limits to how much mass can just come out of nowhere, and I think Plan 9's brain would melt if I tried to imagine the alternative to fun-size dracoforms.

- Very little amuses me more than the constant efforts to apply real-world laws of physics to the realms of magic.
- Man-of-Many-Names

I don't have any information on free drakes beyond what I've already said. You'll need to go to someone else for that. The rest of this post will focus on the relatively more common drakes, that is to say, thralls to dragons.

- On it.
- Frosty

Important thing: As far as I know, only great dragons have access to drakes. I don't remember whether it's a cultural thing, just another way lesser dragons are lesser, or maybe they don't have access to whatever is used to make a drake, but unless a great dragon lends his or hers out, lessers are out of luck. The drakes themselves aren't treated much better. They might be the most valued and dangerous mortal assets in your employ, but they're still just mortals.

The only drake team there is concrete information on is Lofwyr's, because they're technically a unit within Saeder-Krupp's security forces, the Drachenschatten Unit. They're not well-paid compared to, say, the cream of the crop of Knight Errant, and likely have less of a life outside of the company than an entry-level sarariman. Don't be surprised at this. Lofwyr gives zero shits about the ethics of brainwashing what is technically his property.

- Implying that any great dragon has at least some ethical standards. Nice.
- Tolstoi

Other great dragons' drakes are harder to pin down. I know of a dragon cult operating out of the western UCAS, and supposedly the higher-ups in this little cult can transform into metahuman-sized dragons. I'd pin their activities on Ghostwalker, but they're basically a gang with a spiritual bent, and they focus on turf wars, so I don't see how that advances his plans.

Then there's the Brood, a shadowrunner team that seems to consist entirely of drakes and operates worldwide, exclusively taking jobs from the Draco Foundation. There is precious little other information about them, but this is enough to scare me. A lot.

HAVE YOU EVER GOTTEN SO MAD YOU TURNED INTO A DRAGON?

POSTED BY: FROSTY

For once, I'm not at all hamstrung in what I can say, because there's no one in the people I deal with representing the free drake population and putting on constraints. Though as it turns out, that's something of its own problem.

- Am I the only one that's now (further) questioning everything Frosty's ever said with that little line? How do we know she's not telling us just what her secret masters want her to say?
- Clockwork

Free drakes are more common than you think, though they're part of a metatype that's exceptionally rare. Dragons don't much care about their property until they're grown and trained, so the parents of these drakes can sometimes, if they're extremely lucky, escape the dragon's machinations. Usually they have to work through the shadows.

Typically, a free drake is born as a normal metahuman and raised as a normal metahuman. I've heard a lot of them wound up orphans during puberty, suggesting reprisal by the betrayed dragons or agents thereof. I couldn't tell you why the rate of drake re-capture is so low. Maybe a portion of free drakes are part of some plan, or a deal struck a long time ago. I can't get more information than to say that a small percentage of drakes are tolerated as free, as long as they keep to the shadows. Which means any free drake worth his salt will likely wind up a shadowrunner right quick.

That's not to say dragons don't want their property back. And yes, they think of drakes as property. That's a universal notion, and it shouldn't surprise any one of you.

Free drakes tend to undergo their first dracomorphosis in their early twenties, and it generally goes better for them to have the change supervised by a dragon, or whatever other entities might know the secrets behind creating a drake. Without appropriate supervision, the dracoforms start out weaker, with less potent powers. The free drake much teach herself how to use her powers, rather than benefitting from guidance (much as some of us had to learn to be humans, but that's a subject for another time). As far as I know, there are no corporate-controlled drakes, presumably because free drakes have the sense to hide in the shadows after their dracomorphosis. Once you're wanted by the most powerful magical entities on Earth, there's nowhere else to go. That's why so many drakes you see are runners.

Standard operating procedure for drake runners is to find and join a trustworthy group that stays away from the affairs of dragons. Corporate jobs that don't involve S-K are a safe bet, as are street-level runs such as resolving gang problems or troubleshooting for groups like the Ork Rights Committee. If a job stinks too much of magic, they might sit that one out, just to be safe.

Of course, there's always a chance that there's not a team of mercs hired by your would-be patron to abduct you for indoctrination into whatever job a dragon needs done. Your patron could be dead, or there could have been some mistake that makes you too much trouble to recover. You might be in no danger of your not-master wanting you. But do you really, really want to take that chance?

- Here's the interesting thing, which always struck me as weird. Drakes, even the ones dragons have written off or whatever, aren't being researched by any corporation I know of. Even the ones all too happy to cut up technomancers, changelings, whatever's new and weird, for their delicious genetic secrets. Like they're off-limits. Do they just not want to piss off the wizworms, or what? What's the deal here?
- Respec

- Never deal with a dragon is a good rule to live by, no matter where you work.
- Red

Shadowrunning isn't the only underworld work for a free drake, of course. Organized crime, piracy—any job that lets you keep a low personal profile and doesn't get back to great dragons or their servants is viable for a free drake looking to make some nuyen. Hell, I met a drake stripper once. Weird circles she traveled in. Another posed as a changeling to stay in dracoform 24/7. That actually worked for a few months. I think one of Ghostwalker's creatures found her and held her hostage.

To look at drake options beyond that, we have to get into dragon politics, which are more twisted and Byzantine than I have time or space to explore here. Just know that drakes are not willing to step in that minefield—it claimed the life of a great dragon not too long ago, so drakes are not eager to play that game. Some things are worse than servitude.

Now, there's a gigantic president-shaped elephant in the room: Dunkelzahn. Just because he's dead doesn't mean he didn't have drakes of his own. When he died, the drakes serving him went free. Nobody wants to claim Big D's former brood as his own. The ones already indoctrinated and trained mostly went to work at the Draco Foundation. The ones who were still children or hadn't even born yet were put up for adoption, sent away with their metahuman parents, and who knows what else.

Every free drake hopes they were once part of Dunkelzahn's brood, because it means they're free and clear of the great dragons and all their plots and schemes. I don't know how you'd find out for sure, but it probably involves, you guessed it, kids, dealing with a dragon.

My advice: If it turns out you're a drake, keep your head down and only breathe fire when strictly necessary.

GAME INFORMATION

CREATING DRAKE CHARACTERS

Drakes have a key difference from other metatypes, in that a player can either begin play as a drake, or undergo dracomorphosis mid-game. Options are provided for both, though given the particulars of having what amounts to a dragon in your *Shadowrun* group, someone who wishes to play a drake ought to have a long talk with her gamemaster over whether this is advisable and how it should be done.

Creating a drake is just the same as creating any other character. The appropriate quality is selected during character creation when qualities are purchased, and the various benefits and penalties are assigned. The normal limit saying characters cannot have more than 25 Karma worth of Positive Qualities at character creation does not apply to drake qualities, though the limit on 25 Karma worth of Negative Qualities remains in place (not counting Wanted).

Drake characters begin play with the Wanted negative quality (p. 159, *Run Faster*) without the bonus Karma from the quality. This quality can not be bought off at any point. Unaligned drakes are highly sought after pawns by the dragons and of considerable interest to corporations seeking to use their skills or study their abilities. Even the body of a dead drake can fetch a hefty sum on the magical black market because of their potential for use in reagents. In short, it is best to keep the fact that you are a drake a secret to all but those whom you trust with your life.

Newly created drake PC characters are assumed to have recently undergone their first draconic transformation, or at very least to share the qualities of the recently transformed. Fledgling drakes do not, in general, begin their new lives with the entire gamut of modified attributes that NPC drakes possess.

Drakes gain the Dracomorphosis ability, which allows them to transform into their dracoform as a Complex Action. In this form, they gain attribute boosts and special abilities depending on their drake type. Additional abilities can be bought with Karma and are listed in the Drake Optional Powers list (p. 164). The character's modified attributes for when they use their Dracomorphosis ability are listed in the Dracoform Table (p. 163). Attributes are added to a character's standard attributes and can exceed their metatype maximum while in dracoform.

EASTERN DRAKE

In dracoform, most Eastern drakes have thin whiskers around the mouth and a slight fin running down their back to their long tail. Although coloration varies, they are usually dark green or sandy colored with gold scales along the chest and stomach. The claws on their long fingered hands are prominent. Unlike Western and feathered drakes, they do not have wings.

WESTERN DRAKE

In dracoform, Western drakes appear very physically robust, with thick tails and large horns. Their large, prominent scales are usually a single bright color such as red or blue with a lighter shade across the chest, belly, and across their large bat-like wings. Often a row of spines runs down their back.

FEATHERED DRAKE

In dracoform, feathered drakes have a blue or bright green scaly chest and stomach with multicolored feathers covering their head, back, and their birdlike wings. Their tails are usually very long, thin, and flexible with several sharp spines at the tip.

DRACOFORM TABLE

DRAKE TYPE	POWERS	ATTRIBUTE ADJUSTMENTS	NATURAL WEAPON
Eastern Drake	Dual Natured, Elemental Attack, Hardened Armor 2, Hardened Mystic Armor 2, Vestigial Wings*	+1 Bod, +2 Str, +1 Agi, +1 Log	Claws
Western Drake	Dual Natured, Elemental Attack, Hardened Armor 2, Hardened Mystic Armor 2, Vestigial Wings	+2 Bod, +2 Str, +1 Cha	Horns
Feathered Drake	Dual Natured, Elemental Attack, Hardened Armor 2, Hardened Mystic Armor 2, Vestigial Wings	+1 Bod, +1 Str, +1 Agi, +1 Rea, +1 Wil	Tail
Sea Drake	Dual Natured, Elemental Attack, Hardened Armor 2, Hardened Mystic Armor 2, Underwater Adaptation	+1 Bod, +1 Str, +2 Rea, +1 Int	Fangs

* Eastern drakes do not have wings, however they possess a form of natural levitation that functions in effectively the same manner.

SEA DRAKE

In dracoform, sea drakes are covered in shiny, diamond-shaped scales in an array of black-blue, silver, light green, and turquoise. They have the largest snout of the drake species, filled with rows of needle sharp teeth. While they have no wings, their fingers and toes are slightly webbed and their tail is broad and flattened like a crocodile.

DRAKE POWERS

All drake characters begin with certain critter powers and can purchase additional Powers from the Drake Power list (p. 164) as the campaign progresses. Only one additional power with a Karma cost of 4 or less can be purchased every one in-game month and only one additional power with a Karma cost of 5 or greater can be purchased every three in-game months. Becoming a drake does not remove a character's inherent metatype abilities. An elf becoming an Eastern drake does not lose her low-light vision, for instance.

Drake characters can generally accept augmentations, though of course they need to be aware of their balance of Magic and Essence, as well as Magic loss from Essence loss. If a drake's Magic rating ever drops to 0 due to augmentation or Essence Drain, they lose all drake abilities and may never regain them (or the Karma spent acquiring them). Augmentations do not carry over to the dracoform and are inert when the ability is in use. Augmentations revert to normal and reactivate when returning to metahuman form. Any significant bodily changes due to augmentations disappear when the character is in dracoform. For example, a drake with a cyberarm in metahuman form would manifest in dracoform as having two arms. Similarly, any significant body changes in dracoform do not persist in metahuman form, so if a character loses an arm in dracoform, they still have that arm while in metahuman form. Some have theorized that this persistence of form would make it possible to perform augmentations on the drake form. There are several problems with this, the most important being that a drake who falls unconscious reverts to their metahuman form. This would mean that any augmentation in dracoform would require the drake to remain fully conscious during the procedure. The other big problem is that the dracoform physiology is significantly different than metahuman physiology and any augmentations would have to be modified to work with this physiology. This would require intensive (and likely invasive) research, and there is no known evidence of this ever having been performed on a drake.

BECOMING A DRAKE

DRAKE (75 KARMA)

A metahuman with this quality is a drake, a unique creature able to transform into dracoform at will. They gain the Shift (Drake) power and a Magic attribute of 1. The dracoform has the powers of Elemental Attack (Fire), Hardened Armor 2, and Hardened Mystic Armor 2. Drake characters receive additional abilities and attribute modifiers dependent upon their dracoform, as described in their individual descriptions. With their natural magical abilities, it is very common for drakes to be mages or adepts, although not all are.

The high Karma cost for this quality need not be paid completely during character generation, but the balance must be paid with earned Karma during the campaign before the character is able to shift into dracoform for the first time.

LATENT DRACOMORPHOSIS (5 KARMA)

A metahuman may take the Latent Dracomorphosis quality and start the game as a regular character but may later undergo dracomorphosis and become a drake. At the start of the game, the character does not possess a Magic attribute (unless she takes another quality which grants a Magic attribute). The character may not take any of the Infected qualities, Changeling qualities, or the Drake quality. The character may choose the Technomancer quality, but once they undergo their first draconic metamorphosis and gaining a Magic score, they lose their Resonance score, as these abilities are mutually exclusive. At some point during gameplay, the gamemaster may decide for the character to undergo dracomorphosis. This decision is entirely in the gamemaster's hands and should be based entirely on creating a good story—if the player is surprised, all the better. Common triggers for dracomorphosis are proximity to or engagement in powerful magical events, encounters with magical artifacts, and entering areas of very high background count. Dracomorphosis can also trigger Awakening, but need not. If the player wishes to Awaken, they should decide whether to become an adept, aspected magician, magician, or mystic adept. The cost of this selection is included in the Karma cost of this quality. When the gamemaster decides the character has undergone dracomorphosis, the character immediately gains a Magic attribute of 1 (or keeps their own Magic attribute, if they have one). If the character's Essence is less than 1, she has lost any chance to become a drake. The player gains the Drake quality and the gamemaster chooses a dracoform for the character from those provided (p. 163).

The quality does not come free, of course. The character must immediately pay for benefits of their dracomorphosis with Karma—double the cost for buying the quality after character creation (p. 106, SR5), less the cost of the Latent Dracomorphosis quality—(75 - 5) x 2 = 140 Karma, to be exact. If the character does not have Karma available at the time (and few will have a pile of unspent Karma of that size just sitting around), the gamemaster collects it as they deem fit from any Karma awards the character earns until the debt is paid off. Until it is all paid off, some rewards should be phased in—such as one bonus attribute point for every 10 Karma paid, or one dracoform power for each 5 Karma paid.

ELEMENTAL ATTACK

The default elemental effect for a drake's Elemental Attack power is Fire. However, drake characters may switch their Elemental Attack to a different elemental effect by paying 15 Karma. This new elemental effect is permanent until the character decides to pay another 15 Karma and change it.

DRACOFORM POWERS

Dual Natured: As critter power (p. 395, *SR5*).

Elemental Attack [Fire]: As critter power (p. 396, *SR5*).

Hardened Mystic Armor: As critter power (p. 397, *SR5*).

Hardened Natural Armor: As critter power (p. 397, *SR5*).

Natural Weapon [Type]: As critter power (p. 399, *SR5*). Each species of drake possesses one type of Natural Weapon as listed on the Dracoform Table.

Shift (Dracoform): As critter power (p. 194)

Underwater Adaptation: This ability allows a drake to breathe as comfortably under water (salt or fresh) as they do on land. In addition, they receive a +4 dice pool modifier to Swim tests.

Vestigial Wings: As critter power (p. 194).

DRAKE OPTIONAL POWERS

Drake optional powers can only be selected once unless otherwise specified. The Karma cost for each power is listed at the end.

Adaptive Coloration (Sea Drake Only): As critter power (p. 143, *Run Faster*). 9 Karma.

Additional Natural Weapon [Claws]: DV STR + 1P, AP -1). 5 Karma

Additional Natural Weapon [Fangs]: DV STR + 1P, Reach —, AP-2). 5 Karma

Additional Natural Weapon [Tail]: DV STR + 3P, Reach 1, AP -1). 5 Karma

Additional Natural Weapon [Horns]: DV STR + 2P, AP -1). 5 Karma

Animal Control: As critter power (p. 394, *SR5*). 9 Karma

Compulsion: As critter power (p. 395, *SR5*). 9 Karma

Corrosive Spit: As critter power (p. 395, *SR5*). 9 Karma

Dracoform Mastery: You have learned to channel and control the mana which courses through your body in your Dracoform. You can remain in this form as long as you wish without taking Drain; 50 Karma

Dragonspeech: As critter power (p. 395, *SR5*). 9 Karma

Enhanced Sense (Wide Band Hearing): As critter power (p. 396, *SR5*). 3 Karma

Enhanced Sense (Low Light Vision): As critter power (p. 396, *SR5*). 3 Karma

Enhanced Sense (Smell): As critter power (p. 396, *SR5*). 3 Karma

Enhanced Sense (Thermographic Vision): As critter power (p. 396, *SR5*). 3 Karma

Fear: As critter power (p.397, *SR5*). 9 Karma

Flight: The drake gains the ability to truly fly. You can use Karma to purchase ranks in the Flight skill, which

is considered to be part of the Athletics skill group. If you already have the Athletics skill group, you can introduce Flight into the group, having it match the level of the group for the standard Karma cost of purchasing a single skill at that level; after that point, the Flight skill will be increased anytime the entire group is increased (the option of splitting up the group and improving skills individually also remains in place). This flight is as much magical as it is physical. Because of this, extremely high background counts, mana storms, and other such phenomena may disrupt their ability to fly. Sea drakes cannot take this ability. Movement x2/x4/+3. 14 karma

Heavy Scales (Western Drake Only): +2 Hardened Armor. 6 Karma

Improved Natural Armor: Increase both Hardened Armor and Hardened Mystic Armor by 1. This power can be taken a number of times up to the character's Magic rating. 16 Karma

Influence: As critter power (p. 398, *SR5*). 9 Karma

Magical Flight (Eastern Drake Only): Same as Flight Optional Power above, but with a movement rate of x3/x6/+5. 14 Karma

Noxious Breath: As critter power (p. 399, *SR5*). 9 Karma

Resistance to Toxins and Pathogens: As the quality (p. 77, *SR5*). 8 Karma

Tail Stinger (Feathered Drake Only): If an attack with Natural Weapon (Tail) succeeds in dealing damage, a toxin is delivered (Vector: Injection, Speed: 1 Combat Turn, Penetration: 0, Power: Magic, Effect: Physical damage). Using Transcend Form to manifest your tail in metahuman form allows for use of this ability as well. 9 Karma

Transcend Form: The character can activate individual drake powers while in metahuman form, though channeling this draconic power through a non-draconic body has a cost. Take 4P Drain, resisted with Body + Willpower whenever a Drake power is activated in metahuman form. You are able to activate any of the powers you have purchased from the Drake Optional Powers listing as well as your innate drake powers such as your natural weapons or Elemental Attack. Powers that have a persistent effect such as a Natural Weapon last for a number of Combat Turns equal to your Magic rating. After that, you must activate the power again. Using a power this way often has a visible effect, from obvious things such as growing a tail when using your Natural Weapon to subtle differences such as reptilian slit iris while using the enhanced vision. 25 karma

Venom: As critter power (p. 401, *SR5*). 9 karma

THE PRACTICALITIES OF BEING A DRAKE

Although datajacks as well as all other cyberware disappear in dracoform, you are still able to use trodes.

While true dragons are not able to use human speech and must communicate through Dragonspeak, Drakes retain enough of their human physiology to be able to speak normally (if a bit gravellier than usual).

Shifting into dracoform causes a certain degree of body growth, not to mention the appearance of a tail and sometimes wings. This can play havoc with clothing and armor. Some drakes opt for less restrictive clothing while others have their clothing specially tailored with magnetic flaps and size-adjusting gusseting. Such adjustments increase the cost of the armor or clothing by 10%. Keep in mind that a lot of people will pay big money for a drake, so you'd better find a tailor you really trust or learn to do it yourself.

Drakes come in two varieties: NPC drakes that serve the Great Dragons and their affairs, and PC drakes that have slipped the leash and live their own lives on the run from their would-be masters.

DRAKES MID-GAME

As stated above, one cannot become a drake—it is something he or she is born with. However, free drakes often do not achieve dracomorphosis until early-mid adulthood, and some even later than that. As such, buying dracomorphosis in mid-game is more like retconning that your character was an unawakened drake all along. Again, it is advised you work with your gamemaster on this fact, and the circumstances that lead to the initial dracomorphosis.

The change tends to come either when in an extremely high-magic environment, like changelings, or at a moment of intense physical stress. An example might be seeing a dear friend or loved one killed or injured, or a mission going catastrophically wrong in a way that judicious application of Elemental Breath and Natural Weapon with a substantial boost to Strength could solve. These are, of course, just examples. Any highly stressful situation can cause dracomorphosis. Woe be unto the drake that has a panic attack at her day job and finds herself with scales and fire breath. Even more woe be unto her co-workers.

DRAKE NPCS

To create a Drake as an NPC, follow the Superior Prime Runner character creation rules on page 385, *SR5*, with an additional 100 Karma for drake powers. Simple as that!

BUILDING MAN'S BEST FRIEND

POSTED BY: LACEY

- After a little ... discussion regarding the quantity of his previous post versus the value of *season fucking tickets,* Lacey has generously offered up more about the details of modified animals, particularly the ones that have taken on that all-too-ominous name "warforms."
- Slamm-0!

Man's first friend was wolf. From that came man's best friend: dog. Now? I am quite content with my three hounds. I have a Cerberus mastiff named Willies that I raised from a pup, a hellhound stray I adopted who responds to Broomhilda, and a schnauzer who will hop in my lap literally every time I sit down. He's Fred. Most runners who bust into a lab will run across paracritters sooner or later. Why wouldn't they? More often than not, the critters were created and raised there. They guard what's there, and often they are worth more than the goal of the run. Mundane cockatrice, UV-plumed celebrity chimeras, chickens who lay the most delicious eggs you can imagine. Sure, it's tough to build a magical beast, but we can built our own fantastic flesh, and the value is obvious with every new generation model—and the accompanying cred corps will shell out to examine it. Or, if you're a real self-starter like me, you find value by figuring out how to use the critters for your own ends.

- Willies ... like the plural of William?
- Kat o' Nine Tales

- *Oui,* my dear. Three heads, each named William. When someone pisses me off enough, it's time to pay the Bills.
- Lacey

- <facepalm>
- Glitch

So let us talk about this brave new breed of animal, built from the ground up and limited only by our imaginations and our credit lines.

Besides mundane critters and paracritters there are three main categories of unnatural critters on the market: chimerics, warforms, and biodrones.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF DR. MOREAU

The name of chimerics derives from ancient legend, a creature that combined the bodies of a lion, a goat, and a fire-breathing serpent. In ancient days this was, perhaps, a thing of imagination, or some aberrant Awakened creature, or just the fever dream that anything could breed with anything. But science has always been about breaking things down to smaller parts, because when they get small enough, often times you find you can put all the parts together in new and interesting ways. So it is for the geneticist, who finds that he can use bits from a lion, a goat, and a snake together, and what is born can survive—perhaps even thrive.

But what possible purpose could we achieve from such unnatural unions? Quite a few, as we have discovered. First and foremost on your mind is security. Imagine a large cat with the armor plating of an armadillo or the vermonasal organs of a snake. Or a rhesus monkey with patagia, gliding down silently to deliver a neurotoxic bite with its oversized stinger. A chimeric security animal is about taking the most lethal features of nature's arsenal and putting them together to create animal supersoldiers. Faster, tougher, smarter, and best, unpredictable. What you think is merely an adorable capybara munching on manicured corporate grass is actually capable of ultrasonic hearing. When it hears a particular tone, perhaps an alarm, it begins defensively spraying from a skunk-like gland. But that's not musk, it's corrosive and already eating away at you. You may think this mere fancy, but I promise, all of this is possible and more.

The most visible of the chimerics are the genepets. No nova-hot starlet is content with a mere pure-breed purse dog anymore; they want something special, something unique to fit their unique lives. And they are available, though not quite on demand. You see, the dirty secret behind these animals is that they are, more often than not, simply mistakes. Rough drafts of genetic template combinations that just so happen to be the perfect combination of harmless and cute, marketable as designer pets for the rich or eccentric.

- It's not all mistakes and side effects. Several art house genetic groups of biopunks use their labs to try to fashion what they consider "living art." They tweak and add here and there until they create what they claim are entirely new forms of life. GodKanvas in the Chicago Northside sprawl has made it their mission to make an adorable breed of devil rat. Berlin's Die Kunst des Lebens gallery unveiled a kind of underwater … I don't know what. It was beautiful, sort of fractal and weird and made me think of Lovecraft stories.
- Kat o' NineTales

- Who would want to make devil rats adorable? Why not make them, I don't know, *less dangerous*?
- Aufheben

- That's the kind of attitude that destroys entire biospheres. Don't you think we've interfered enough?
- Ecotope

- You can't get them designed to spec? How come?
- Lyran

- He gets to science of that a little later on, but one economic reason is the "Spontaneity Index." When you make art, part of the point is that is is discovered, rather than made according to plan. Something you find may seem to have more value than something you commission, because it challenges and inspires you in new ways. It factors into a lot of social engineering and marketing, including portraying a sense of adventure and taste for having found it first, or being avant-garde enough to recognize its value and acquire it. Believe me, the bleeding edge of fashion is big money, and it can shape entire memes and trends for the heavy hitters in R&D and Marketing.
- Sunshine

For the mid-range chimera owner, there are certain pets that have proven so popular that the demand had to be satisfied. A few years ago you only found Cerberus corgis on the arms of starlets and tinies in corporate gene zoos. This past Christmas, over 50,000 three-headed fuzzballs poked their way out from under the yule tree to the delight of children and spouses everywhere.

- No, they won't hurt much if they bite, but it's three times the barking on a B&E. Remember that.
- Ma'Fan

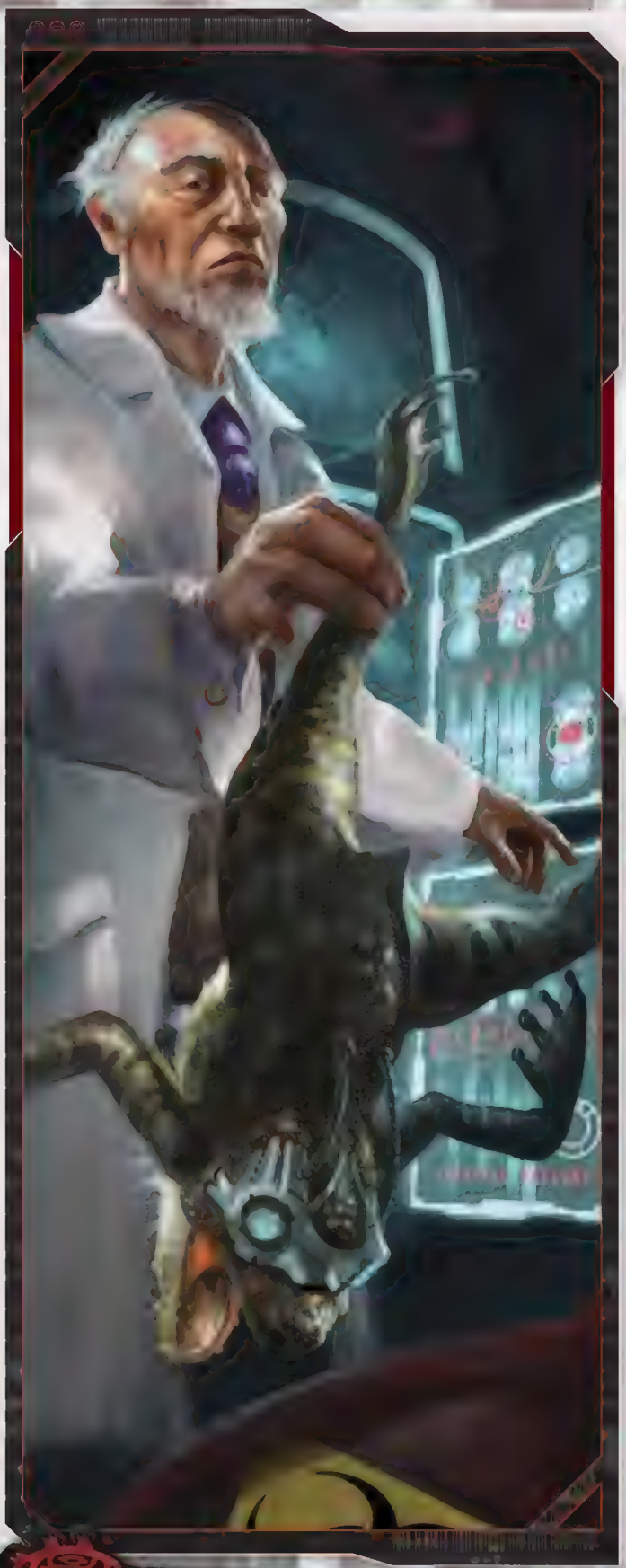
- I really can't handle how cuddly and soft they are. They are so, *so* friendly!
- Turbo Bunny

- That's due to trace levels of other breeds introduced in a very, very precise fashion. They will never grow too large, they will never display hostile behavior, they will keep learning new tricks, they are intensely loyal to their family unit, and they are quite intelligent. It took a balancing act of over two hundred breeds of dog to get just the right combination without sacrificing the primacy of Cerberus or corgi physical expression.
- KAM

- Man, you like to take the fun out of everything, don't you?
- Turbo Bunny

The least visible, yet most used and indeed seen, are the commercial chimerics. We talk about frankenfoods all the time, the genetically modified vegetation and animals that account for most of the so-called fresh produce we consume. It's a step up from recontexturalized soy and krill with flavor from the faucet, but it's still not the genuine beef, cheese, fruits, or vegetables our ancestors enjoyed, and which the super-rich can still have set on their table. Rather, it's something modified to produce more, faster, cleaner food. Or at least clean enough for a megacorp's own safety standards. Ah, monopoly. But I digress

But for every naturalist who decries genetically modified produce, there is the simple fact that, quite often, these genetweaked animals can, indeed, make novel flavors and produce greater nutrition, and do it at a pace that allows metahumanity to keep eating. Consider Healthy Farms Farm-Fresh Organic Brown Eggs, available any fine grocery outlet in the UCAS. Sure, it's a frankenfood, but did you know that those eggs come



from chickens which incorporate the genetic material of chickens, ostriches, pigeons, quails and a little bit of toad to hold it all together? And did you know that by using these particular laying hens, they need fewer of them, meaning they can happily roam free when they aren't laying? And did you further know that each of those eggs contains three times the protein content as eggs from before the turn of the century? To say nothing of all the vitamins they have that were never present in farm eggs before. Sure, it's pricey. Sure, it's not the way nature intended. But damn, it's tasty, and it's good for you.

- Plus, have you ever actually *seen* ancestor food? The stuff that, say, a banana is evolved from? It hardly looks edible, at all.
- Kat o' NineTales

- Yeah, but I don't think kiwinanas are naturally occurring, either ...
- 2XL

- For once, I'd call that a win for science.
- The Smiling Bandit

- God I miss food.
- Red

- Unless you've got the cred for the real thing, you're not missing much.
- Sounder

- What? Nonsense. You just don't appreciate the pleasures of a Big Beef and Kimchi Burrito from the Stuffer Shack at two a.m. Or a crackling bowl of Choco-Bombs mixed with fresh-popped soycorn. Or—
- Slamm-0

- Please stop.
- Red

- The same goes for any kind of food in the past two centuries, at least, and in many cases even longer than that. Evolutionary models of most flora and fauna for consumption are vastly different, and often unrecognizable, compared to the form we consider palatable today.
- KAM

Of course, despite the precision demanded of genetech, it is far from without problems, the most glaring of which is the complexity of how genetic structures inter-

act with one another in unforeseen ways. Let's look at the examples I've given so far.

- Armor cats lose a great deal of their flexibility from the armadillo plating, which is fine if they get the drop, but they can't dodge as well as a normal cat. That's just a practical tradeoff.
- Rhesus scorpios are very, very aggressive. The hyperactivity of the sugar glider lends it an enhanced metabolism, which interacts with the hormonal balance of the monkey, provoking a very hostile attitude. The stinger just makes the threat that much greater.
- Spray caps have an extraordinary diet. That corp grass I mentioned? It is also genetically engineered to grow fast. It better, because escaped spray caps can strip natural land bare in minutes. Not a cheap beast.
- Cerberus corgis aren't cheap pets to buy, but the real cost is in keeping them. They have very specific dietary needs, and you can't go feeding them scraps from the plate or any old kibble from the store. They need specially balanced food (also made by the same distributor. Coincidence? Nope, vertical integration) that contains the very precise vitamin and amino acid combinations to keep them not only healthy, but alive. Maybe that was built in. Maybe the price of it's existence by chance. Who knows?
- Chimera chickens often have short lives. The ability to generate so many eggs, so often, so large, and packed with nutrition, demands great quantities of sustenance, and the process takes a tremendous toll on their bodies. More often than not, they burn out. All accounts say they are pretty happy, as far as chickens go, but still, protests and boycotts march on.

- Can you imagine an existence more horrifying?
- Ecotope

- As a matter of fact ...
- Hannibelle

The tinies, though a simple concept, were exceptionally difficult to manufacture. Simply shrinking down existing large species often causes extensive health issues and genetic instabilities. The physical structure of an elephant simply cannot function scaled down to a quarter-meter tall. The tiny elephant is produced with the base DNA of a rock hyrax (a close relative of the elephant) to produce a creature that has the desired appearance. The tiny giraffe is produced from the DNA of an extinct breed of protohorse called Eohippus with heavy cross species gene splicing. Chimeric modifications are easiest with critters within the same genetic Class, for example from one mammal to another. Crossing Phylum lines is very difficult, for example having a mammal with bird or fish traits. Crossing Kingdom lines is impossible, so no plants with shark teeth.

- Can they do this in reverse to make a bigger version? Because I would love to watch the megacorps build a Godzilla and just go for it.
- Slamm-0

- You honestly think Lofwyr would stand for that?
- Frosty

- What about the genemod that makes your skin green and lets you photosynthesize? Isn't that a plant ability on a mammal?
- Hard Exit

- Solus, the genemod that grants an individual limited photosynthetic capabilities, was derived from studying the genetics of certain individuals who had undergone SURGE and the elven metavariant Xapiri Thëpë. We don't understand how it works, but we know which section of DNA can be copied to make it work. It isn't publicized, but more than a few genemods were discovered this way and are as much of a mystery.
- KAM

- Changelings can make a good bit of spare nuyen volunteering for clinical studies, but rumors of individuals who exhibit rare metagenetics disappearing keep volunteers away.
- The Smiling Bandit

One thing to remember with chimerics is that function is always a lot more complex than form. It is relatively easy to make a horse with wings, but making one that can fly is impossible without changing so many other characteristics that it is barely recognizable as having once been a horse. Yes, pegasi exist, but they are able to fly like they do through magic, not biology. So far, as with metahumans, magical ability cannot be duplicated through genetic modification.

- Discovering the method to manifest or manipulate the so-called "Magus Factor" remains the highest priority for genetic research. Whoever had meaningful research toward that end could write their own check.
- KAM

- And whoever held the key to making it happen would rule the world.
- The Smiling Bandit

- Some matters of spirit cannot be quantified by science.
- Man-of-Many-Names

- Actually, there's a juicy little theory floating making the rounds right now that magic doesn't manifest due to the presence of any single gene, but a precise balance of circumstances in an individual, unlocking the potential which would exist in all of us. Of course, the variables are damn near infinite, so proving it would be next to impossible.
- Lyran

- You underestimate the resources of the megacorps, I fear.
- Beaker

But wait, it gets better. Remember a minute ago when I mentioned tradeoffs? A lot of those may seem obvious, but it's almost impossible to avoid them happening in some fashion. There is no perfect chimera. Recombining genes between two or more creatures has a number of difficulties, but the most insurmountable is that one individual gene can code for multiple traits, so controlling the outcome can be tricky. Desired changes often lead to unintended secondary changes. A frog modified to secrete mammalian hormones may spontaneously sprout fur. A bear modified to have scaly reptilian armor may have its metabolic processes affected making it cold blooded. The law of unintended consequence is in full effect here. Chimerics are always sterile, if not directly from the genetic manipulation, then from the corp protecting themselves from unlicensed duplication of intellectual property.

CHIMERIC MODIFICATIONS

Chimeric modification, or series of modifications, represents the core of what makes a chimeric creature what it is. The creature is given abilities beyond what its species normally possesses. These new abilities almost always include a noticeable change in the physiology and behavior of the creature, such as unusual patches of fur or scales, a change in the appearance of the eyes, or behaviors alien to the native species but common in the genetically grafted species.

Unless specifically mentioned, a modification cannot be chosen more than once. All abilities are considered mundane critter powers and do not require the critter to be Awakened to function. Costs for chimerics are triple the base creature cost plus twenty-five percent for each type of genetic modification and fifty percent for each chimeric ability. These costs presume that a viable sample has already been produced. The research and development of an untested new chimeric is much higher. A chimeric critter can only possess up to six chimeric modifications. After that, their genetic structure becomes too unstable, and the genetic blueprint will fail to generate a viable embryo. There are rumors of delta gene clinics that can exceed this limit, but this information cannot be verified.

All-Around Sight: Whether from having independently moving eyes like a chameleon or multiple composite eyes like an insect, the critter can see in all directions at once. The critter always gets a Perception test to detect a surprise attack.

Aquatic Adaptation: This set of traits varies between critters from nictitating membranes over the eye to webbed digits to a flattened tail, but in all cases the benefit is the same. The critter uses the underwater visibility modifiers (p. 157, *Run & Gun*) as if he were wearing goggles or a mask, gains a +2 to Swimming tests, and may hold its breath for twice as long (p.137, *SR5*, doubles base time and time gained on net successes of test).

Attribute Enhancement: The critter has been engineered to enhance certain traits, making the creature stronger, faster, or smarter. Increase one attribute by fifty percent, rounded up. Applying Attribute Enhancement to an attribute of 0 increases it to 1. This modification can be selected more than once, but not for the same attribute.

Balance Tail: Most critters use their tail to swat flies or signal moods, but critters with a balance tail receive a +1 dice pool modifier for all Balance, Climbing, Gymnastics, Free-Fall, or Jumping-related tests.

Bioluminescence: The critter has specialized dermal cells that produce an enzyme that produces light. This light counts as Dim Light (p. 175, *SR5*) for the creature and those immediately adjacent to it. However, it also makes the creature much easier to spot, giving opponents a +3 on Perception tests to see it.

Biotoxin Alteration: This genetic alteration modifies the normal toxin producing glands in a critter, causing them to produce a different toxin entirely. This trait can modify the Scent Spray and Venom chimeric traits as well as any similar natural toxins possessed by the base creature. Chimeric critters with the Biotoxin Alteration always have the Dietary Requirement (Tailored Nutrition) weakness.

- **Anesthetic:** Vector: Inhalation, Speed: 1 Combat Turn, Penetration: 0, Power: 6, Effects: Stun Damage
- **Formic Acid:** Derived from certain species of ants, the critter can produce a powerful acid. Vector: Contact, Speed: 1 Combat Turn, Penetration: 0, Power 4, Effects: Physical Damage. Whether the physical damage is resisted or not, any armor struck by the spray loses 1 point of Armor Rating per Combat turn for a number of turns equal to the Power of the acid. This damage can be prevented by washing off the acid with a large quantity of water or with a highly basic solution.
- **Hallucinogen:** Vector: Inhalation, Speed: 1 Combat Turn, Penetration: 0, Power: 6, Effects: Hallucination. A hallucinating target sees figments that can elicit various emotional reactions. Roll 1D6 to determine the effect of the hallucination, then consult the Hallucination Result table.

The subject feels the emotion wholeheartedly, and it affects their physical performance in a manner consistent with the emotion. Conducting actions opposed to the emotion requires a Willpower (2) test. For example, subjects feeling rage engaging in combat suffer no penalties, whereas if the subject were attempting negotiations the negative modifier would apply.

HALLUCINATION RESULTS

RESULT	EFFECT	NOTE
1	Fear	Affected character flees from the area.
2	Fascination	Affected character ignores all other stimuli to stare at the hallucinations.
3	Love	Affected character makes amorous advances at a nearby individual.
4	Despair	Affected character attempts to surrender.
5	Depression	Affected character takes a –2 to all actions.
6	Rage	Affected character attacks random nearby target, friendly or not.

- **Nauseating:** Vector: Inhalation, Speed: 1 Combat Turn, Penetration: 0, Power: 6, Effects: Nausea (p. 409, *SR5*).

Camouflage: Whether it is fur, feathers, or scales, the creature's coloration lends itself to concealment in a particular environment. The critter receives a +1 dice pool modifier for Sneaking Tests in any condition with decreased light levels and in environments appropriate to the pattern (stripes in tall grass, spots in a forest or jungle, etc.).

Celerity: The critter's body is made for speed, with long powerful legs. The critter increases its Walking and Running multipliers by 1 and also adds +1m/ turn to her Sprint Increase (see **Movement**, p. 161, *SR5*).

Climate Adaptation: The critter's metabolic processes, skin tissue, and regulation cycles are adapted to extreme heat or cold climates, enabling the critter to adjust more easily to hot or cold temperatures. This quality grants a +2 dice pool modifier for Survival Tests (p. 136, *SR5*) and resisting fatigue damage (see p. 172, *SR5*) from their chosen environment and a –2 dice pool modifier from the other. Choose a climate when selecting this trait.

Defensive Secretion: The critter's dermal cells allow it to exude a defensive liquid when agitated or endangered, similar to the defensive secretions of some frogs and insects. Though not poisonous, these secretions are either acidic, creating a burning sensation upon touch, or cause other adverse skin reactions. As soon as someone touches the bare skin of the agitated critter with unprotected skin, they suffer a –1 dice pool modifier for all tests made within the next twenty-four hours or until treated with a successful Medicine + Logic [Mental] (2) Test. If an individual affected by the secretion is allergic to the base critter of the chimeric, increase the modifier to –2.

Dynamic Coloration: The critter's skin changes color only when exposed for a prolonged time (1 minute) to a background with sharp contrasts, like colorful patterns, and it retains the new color for up to four hours total. If the background around it changes, the color fades and the creature's coloration returns to normal within ten minutes. While the camouflage is in effect, increase the threshold to see the critter by 2, as long as it is standing still.

Echolocation: Changes in the ear, vocal chords, and spatial-auditory portions of the brain enable the critter to visualize its surroundings by sending and receiving sonic pulses. The critter suffers no Visibility modifiers to Perception tests regardless of light conditions, even complete darkness (p. 175, *SR5*). The only limitations are that solid objects like glass or concrete block the sense and the range is limited to twenty meters in air and two hundred meters in water.

Electrocytes: Derived from the electric eel, this modification generates stacks of specialized cells capable of generating electrical potential. These electrocytes allow the critter to deliver an electrical attack with a successful touch-only melee attack (p. 187, *SR5*). This attack has a DV (Bod)S(e), AP –6.

Enhanced Sense (Low Light Vision, Thermographic Vision): These senses function the same for the critter as a metahuman with the equivalent sense.

Enhanced Sense (Scent): The best bloodhound can pick up the scent of a single individual within a crowd of people. This trait gives a +2 dice pool modifier and +1 limit to tests made using scent-based Perception and scent-based Tracking tests.

Enhanced Sense (Broadened Auditory Spectrum): A critter with this trait can hear ultrasonic, high-frequency sound (including ultrasound emitters) or infrasonic, low-frequency sound (including Infrasonic Generator cyberware). This ability allows the critter to make a Perception test to detect communication or sounds within a wider band of frequencies and adds +1 to the limit of Perception tests involving sound. As this kind of hearing can be considered always on, noises inaudible to others may sometimes distract or deafen the critter. This quality results in minor visible changes to the size and structure of the outer ear.

Extra Head: The only repeatedly successful genetic extraction from a paracritter, the Cerberus hound, this trait adds an additional head to the critter. This trait can be selected twice for a maximum of three heads on a critter. Each additional head adds 1 box to the Physical Condition Monitor and +1 to Perception tests. If the base critter possesses a natural attack originating from the head such as horns, tusks, or a bite, additional heads gain this trait as well. The critter with more than one head can continue to function if a head is severed as long as at least one head remains and the damage did not incapacitate the critter. Multi-headed chimerics tend to be easily distractable.

Frog Tongue: The critter possesses a long adhesive tongue similar to a frog or chameleon, which can be extended in a spring-loaded fashion by a muscular trigger. When triggered, it shoots outward to strike at a target and then retracts. Though not prehensile enough to manipulate a tool, the tongue is strong enough to snatch an object, provided the object's weight is less than the critter's Strength x 100 grams. Because of the tongue's sticky secretions, the object will stick to the tongue until manually removed. If the critter also possesses the Venom associated with its bite (p. 401, *SR5*) the tongue can be used to apply the substance with a successful touch-only melee attack (p. 187, *SR5*) using the Exotic Melee Weapon (Frog Tongue) skill of which the critter gains 1 rank for free.

Gills: A critter with gills is capable of extracting oxygen from water, allowing them to stay submerged indefinitely. This adaptation, most commonly added to chimerics whose base creature has lungs, is usually adapted from lungfish genetics, and allows the creature to stay out of the water indefinitely without suffering from any ill effects due to their gills.

Gliding: The critter has flaps of skin, semi-functional wings, or some other feature that allows it to glide short distances. Creatures with the Gliding ability start with one rank in the Free-Fall skill. This can be further increased using the Skill Enhancement trait. Critters use Agility instead of Body when using the Free-Fall skill to glide, because it is more about the fine motor reflexes than pure physicality. A gliding critter can avoid falling damage from any distance with a Free-Fall + Agility [Physical] (2) Success test. While falling, they can choose to travel up to twice the distance horizontally that they fall vertically. In one Combat Turn, a gliding critter falls ten meters and can move up to twenty meters horizontally. They must always be moving from a high point to a lower point—no gliding up!

Ink Extrusion: Designed to blind a target, the creature extrudes a dark viscous substance that applies a penalty to all Perception (Visual) tests equal to the Body of the creature extruding it. The ink permanently stains most porous items and clothing. When used under water, the ink spreads in an area covering a number of meters equal to the critter's Body. To strike an intended target, the critter rolls a ranged attack using Exotic Ranged Weapon + Agility with a range of (Body) meters.

Magnetoception: This adaptation allows a critter to sense changes in nearby magnetic fields. This is accomplished by an elevated level of magnetite in the ethmoid bone of the nose and specialized neural pathways linking to a modified olfactory bulb and olfactory cortex. Critters with this quality can literally sniff out the presence, direction, and intensity of magnetic fields, such as those generated by electronics, power supplies, or magnetic anomaly detectors. The critter also has an unerring ability to locate magnetic north, providing a +2 dice pool bonus to Navigation tests. The critter makes a Perception + Intuition [Mental] v. Object Resistance (p. 293, *SR5*) Test to detect these emanations within a range of five meters.

Natural Weapon: This trait takes the most dangerous bits from one animal and puts it on another. The animal must, of course, have the physical features to accommodate the natural weapon. For example, you can't engineer a snake with claws—show some respect for nature. And physics. Consult the Natural Weapons table to see the available options.

NATURAL WEAPONS

WEAPON	DV	AP	REACH
Bite	Str +2	-2	-1
Claws	Str+1	-1	—
Horns	Str+2	-1	—
Tail	Str+3	—	1
Tusk	Str+2	—	—

Proboscis: The critter possesses a prehensile nose similar to an elephant's trunk. It can be used for small manipulations or even a blunt punch using the Exotic Melee Weapon (Trunk) skill (DV (STR - 1)P, Reach —, AP +1). Apply a -2 dice pool modifier to any attempt to manipulate an object with the trunk. It has an effective Strength equal to the critter's Strength. Trunks do not provide an extra attack.

Potent Venom: This modification enhances the creature's ability to produce a natural toxin. Increase the Power of the critter's venom by fifty percent, rounded up. This modification has no effect on a creature without a natural toxin.

Quills: These modified hairs are coated with thick keratin plates that resemble porcupine quills, interspersed with bristles, under fur and hair. Quills are two to four centimeters long, sharp as needles, and detach easily when used in close combat. Quills are used as a defensive mechanism to hold off attackers. If the critter is successfully grappled in close combat (see **Subduing**, p. 195, *SR5*), the attacker

makes a Damage Resistance Test against a DV of (STR + 1) P, AP +1, using the higher Strength attribute of the grappling pair. Quills can be wielded in melee combat using the Exotic Melee Weapon (Quills) skill, with the following stats: DV (STR + 1)P, Reach —, AP +1.

Scent Spray: The critter possesses scent glands that produce a foul odor similar to skunk spray. The scent gland can be used to make a ranged attack using the Exotic Ranged Weapon (Scent Gland) skill as a touch-only ranged attack (p. 187, *SR5*) to spray a single target within (Body) meters with a stinking mist. Targets struck the by the spray may experience Nausea (p. 409, *SR5*). The spray becomes inert after two minutes of exposure to the air. Normal armor offers no protection, though Chemical Resistance and other similar upgrades do. At the best of times, the critter smells pungent, imparting a +2 dice pool modifier to locate the critter by scent.

- **Vector:** Inhalation
- **Speed:** Immediate
- **Penetration:** -2
- **Power:** 6
- **Effect:** Nausea

Skill Enhancement: This modification reinforces certain behavioral instincts in the creature. Increase one natural skill of the critter by 2. This modification can be selected more than once, but not for the same skill. This modification can only be selected for a skill the critter already possesses. Teaching a critter a new skill can only be done using the Training rules.

Sturdiness: This modification adds several subtle genetic tweaks of mostly reptilian genes that improve the physical stature and robustness of the chimera. Increase the critter's Physical Limit by 1. In addition, if the critter has the Fragile weakness, reduce it by 1.

Thermosense: Like a snake, the critter possesses infrared-sensitive receptors next to their olfactory organs that allow them to sense radiated heat. This quality allows the critter to make a non-visual Perception test to detect anything that produces heat (bodies, electronics, etc.) within ten meters. Thresholds and modifiers can be adjusted for factors such as warm environments, lower heat outputs (such as friction or decomposition), or heat pollution (too many sources, thermal smoke, etc.). Hits on the test give information on distance, movement, heat output, and location. The sense is not fooled by Invisibility or Silence spells. When using thermal sensitivity in combat, the sense reduces the Visibility and Light/ Glare modifiers by one level.

Thicker Hide: This modification produces a critter with heavier scales, thicker fur, or tougher skin. Increase the critter's natural Armor by fifty percent, rounded up. Critters without a natural armor are instead granted a natural Armor of 3 or their Body, whichever is lower. This modification cannot be used to enhance creatures with Hardened Armor.

Venom: Venom is a potent trait that can make even a small critter very dangerous. This trait adds the physiological structures required to generate a biological toxin and deliver it through a natural attack (chosen when ability is selected).

Vector: Injection
Speed: 1 Combat Turn
Penetration: 0
Power: 6
Effect: Physical Damage

Vestigial Wings: This trait adds either bat-like or birdlike wings to a creature which does not naturally fly. These wings are insufficient for true flight due to the lack of appropriate musculature and low body weight found in flying critters. They are not without benefit however. If a creature with Vestigial Wings should happen to fall, reduce the effective distance of a fall by four meters when calculating the falling damage (p. 172, *SR5*), and they receive a +2 dice pool modifier on jumping tests (p. 134-135, *SR5*).

Wall Climbing: Based on gecko and spider genetics, this modification allows the critter to move along vertical surfaces. Critters with this trait always use assisted climbing rates (p. 134, *SR5*). Critters with four or more legs and a Body of 3 or less are even capable of climbing inverted on horizontal surfaces such as ceilings.

Web Extrusion: The critter has a natural gland for producing spider silk and the spinnerets to weave it. The spider silk is very strong relative to the creature that produced it. It can hold up to twice the weight of the creature that spins it. A web spun of spider silk is difficult to see, applying a -2 modifier to Perception tests to notice it. The web is capable of entangling a victim with a Body equal to or less than the Body of the creature that spun it. The critter can also use the webbing in conjunction with the Free-Fall skill to lower themselves from an elevated position.

SAMPLE CHIMERICS

Taser Squid: A chimeric hybrid of a Humboldt squid and an electric eel, these critters were created to defend underwater facilities. Their natural pack-hunting behavior makes them extremely deadly. They are generally trained to respond to sonic cues to swarm and attack any submersibles or divers intruding on their territory. A different sonic cue will pacify them allowing safe passage through their territory.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
6	5	3	7	3	3	4	3	3	6.0

Initiative	7 + 1D6
Movement	x3/x8/+2 swimming
Condition Monitor	11/9
Limits	Physical 7, Mental 6, Social 5
Armor	0
Skills	Escape Artist 5, Exotic Ranged Weapon (Ink) 1, Perception 4, Swimming 5, Unarmed Combat 4
Powers	Attribute Enhancement (Body), Electrocytes (DV (Bod)S(e), AP –6, Reach +3), Gills, Natural Attack (Bite DV(STR + 2)P), Substance Extrusion (Ink)
Weaknesses	Precarious Physiology
Note	Common tricks include Detect (Explosives), Homing, Patrol, Trigger Training (Ultrasonic). The +3 Reach of the electrical attack is due to the Electrocytes located along the squid's long tentacles.

Sugar Cat: A hybrid chimeric based off of a house cat combined with sugar glider DNA, the sugar cat has been genetically modified to have the loose flaps of skin and flexible joints of a sugar glider, allowing it to stretch out its legs to extend the loose flaps of skin and fly.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
2	5	3	2	3	3	2	2	3	6.3

Initiative	5 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x6/+4
Condition Monitor	8/10
Limits	Physical 4, Mental 4, Social 5
Armor	0
Skills	Climbing 3, Free Fall 3, Sneaking 2, Perception 3, Tracking 3, Unarmed Combat 3
Powers	Attribute Enhancement (Agility), Balance Tail, Enhanced Senses (Low Light), Gliding, Skill Enhancement (Free-Fall), Sturdiness
Weaknesses	Fragile 1, Precarious Physiology
Note	Common tricks include Attack, Patrol

Spray Cap: Base on the largest member of the rodent family, the capybara, the spray cap is normally placid and quite calm around humans. They are trained to respond to an ultrasonic signal to take a defensive posture and use their hallucinogenic spray attack liberally.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	3	6.0

Initiative	3 + 2D6
Movement	x2/x6/+4
Condition Monitor	7/9
Limits	Physical 3, Mental 2, Social 3
Armor	0
Skills	Exotic Ranged Attack (Hallucinogenic Spray) 3, Gymnastics 3, Perception 3, Sneaking 3, Unarmed Combat 2
Powers	Attribute Enhancement (Strength), Biotoxin Alteration (Hallucinogen), Enhanced Sense (Broadened Auditory Spectrum), Enhanced Sense (Smell), Gestalt Consciousness, Natural Weapon (Bite: DV (STR+1) P, AP —, –1 reach), Scent Spray, Skill Enhancement (Exotic Ranged Attack [Hallucinogenic Spray]), Sturdiness
Weaknesses	Dietary Requirement (Tailored Nutrition), Fragile 2, Precarious Physiology
Note	Common tricks include Attack and Trigger Training. The spray cap uses the base stats of a rat.

THE GENETIC KENNEL

What was once once done through laborious breeding and culling over generations can be performed quickly through advanced genetic manipulation. Warforms are the height of genetic engineering, creatures that are superior to their natural counterparts in every way. Unlike chimerics, their DNA is only derived from their own species, but with the most desirable traits selected and weaknesses removed.

- Holy shit. Why even bother with chimerics?
- Snopes

- Two reasons. First, it's a lot cheaper and faster to keep using patterns that have already been established. Chimerics were the first steps along this path before critters-from-scratch were technologically possible. Genetic design is hardly as real-time as they make it out to be. You don't just select the traits you want and "poof" out comes a ready-made masterpiece of biology. It takes months, even years of careful balancing to create a workable creature, to say nothing of one that can actually outperform what evolution has produced. That's months and years they still have to make products, so they keep on churning out the stuff that works.

  The second reason, and what keeps new chimerics being made, is that you can find some amazing patterns and combinations just through the raw experimentation phase, and if something works, a corp will sell it. Chimeric manipulation isn't just about designing the perfect pet or guard animal, it's also about discovering interactions so you can use that data later in a warform or even in bio and geneware. Sometimes you can find new traits you weren't even looking for.
- The Smiling Bandit

- And for every one of those "successes," there's a million twisted abominations, writhing in cages, their whole lives pain. You've never raided a containment lab. You've never smelled the stink or heard the cries of those tortured lives. Nothing could be worth that kind of evil.
- Ecotope

- Cry me a fucking river.
- Clockwork

Warforms began as a result of medical research in the development of bioware, cyberware, and geneware. The research naturally was tested on animals before it was tested on humans (in most cases), and it quickly became evident that the test animals had value in their own right. Often, their deployment also served as a field-test phase. Owners know they have a prototype when the corp offers a discount or free vet service if the corp can keep them monitored.

- Sometimes building the better mousetrap means building a better cat.
- Man-of-Many-Names

- The corps aren't shy about making sure you know they built that cat. It has been standard practice since the

twentieth century for genetically engineered plants and animals to have proprietary genetic markers inserted into their DNA. In recent years they got creative and made those markers express as skin or fur patterns that spell out the corporate logo somewhere on the critter's body.

- The Smiling Bandit

- Ugh. That's so tacky.
- Kat o' NineTales

Warforms are so-named because the majority of them are utilized in a combat theatre. While it may be possible to make better pets and better food, in truth there is little demand and even less cost-effectiveness. Chimeric forms cover most of that territory just fine, and the few efforts to make the perfect beef cow or a goose that lays golden eggs are mostly pet projects that geneticists do on the side.

- Again, indie lab biohackers are the main source of things like this. The development time is awfully long, though, without access to funds and equipment to make it happen.
- The Smiling Bandit

- You've got a lot of love for them, don't you, Bandit?
- Red

- What's not to love about rebel scientists in it for the pure research?
- The Smiling Bandit

- Oh, please.
- KAM

- Sorry to contradict you, Lacey, but there *are* genetically perfected food animals. My crew ran across some not too long ago. Turns out they just aren't for sale. Seems Yakashima had it in their heads to make the genetically perfect Kobe beef and dropped a great big pile of nuyen into taking over the steak market. The twist? Food snobs like their food to be from a long pedigree, all natural. The idea of eating what amounted to cloned food reeked of the standard to them, and Yakashima was left holding on to about five thousand heads of the most perfect cows you'll ever see. *Then* they tried finding a way to just take over the mid-range food market to cut costs. What happens? KIT steps in and protests creating a so-called "perfect cow" for religious reasons! And KIT has enough clout in the Pan-Pacific to promise merry hell if they try and sell them. They could destroy them, but that's billions of nuyen gone to waste. So right now the poor things are sitting in a pasture (happy to sell the location—PM me), waiting for Yakashima to come up with something to do with them.
- Rigger X

After years of leading the pack (pun intended) with numerous product demos and press releases, Parashield was the first to bring genetically engineered combat critters or "warforms" to market. It was perhaps too soon for them, as the units were difficult to control and suffered a host of health problems. The second generation of warforms was far more successful and was released by a surprising source—Aztechnology, out of their Nordina Biotech subsidiary. These new warforms were based on a different philosophy than the first generation. The first generation was an attempt to turn an animal into a drone, but in doing so they lost many of the benefits of using a critter in the first place. The second generation was engineered with bioware and genetic augmentations holistically integrated into the critter's body. Cyberware was eschewed completely. The result is an animal that is capable of independent thought yet is trainable. They have far greater capabilities than their natural brothers, but they still are able to heal naturally from damage.

- So, basically, a warform is just a critter that has been optimized?
- Netcat

- Aptly put. But they can also be enhanced past the normal range of the animal's capabilities. This isn't often done, though, as the greatest appeal of a warform is its perfected natural abilities, not augmented or supernatural ones.
- KAM

The real potential of a warform has yet to be fully realized, of course. With the possibility of tinker-toy genetics, we may begin to see the first truly novel life forms, created at the hand of mankind.

- Now listen to that again, but have a crash of lightning and a maniacal laugh at the end.
- The Smiling Bandit

- It's all hyperbole anyway. It's highly unlikely that this kind of technology will ever be possible. And if it is, we won't see it in our lifetimes.
- KAM

- Coming from a doctor who could get lèonized whenever she wants, that's really saying something.
- The Smiling Bandit

The process is made possible by modifying the creature in vitro. The best of the best specimens go into them, which are then augmented using pluripotent stem cells to make any further modifications. Unlike metahumans, they won't complain about their 'ware later in life. Hell, they won't complain at all. A chihuahua doesn't gripe that it isn't as fast as a greyhound. It doesn't even

occur to them. So an alpha-grade mastiff doesn't think about having jaws that can crush bone. It's always been big. There's no training curve. Even better, because of the stock from which they derive, their enhanced intelligence and the lack of psychologically imbalancing implants, these animals manifest the best domestic tendencies an animal can.

- It should be noted that all warforms sold are male, supposedly due to their larger size and strength. I think it is possible that there are females being kept for experimentation with naturally reproducing warforms.
- Lacey

- I got a look at some production data on this new generation, and the methodologies are strikingly similar to the work Owains Bionatural was doing with integrating non-metahuman code into metahuman DNA in order to maintain biological integrity in spite of augmentations. Only this time it is in reverse. I really hope I am wrong.
- The Smiling Bandit

- That might explain the story I heard of a team that jacked an Azzie cargo truck only to find a lone poodle inside. They locked it up in one chummer's bedroom, and it was gone the next time they checked. They looked at the surveillance record and saw the dog open the door to the room, snag a credstick from the kitchen counter, and walk out. The decker snooped a GridGuide cam feed, and they saw the poodle hopping on a drone bus. It bought a fraggin' ticket!
- Plan 9

- Riiiiiight.
- Snopes

- I wouldn't be so quick to dismiss him ... her? Training warforms is almost a pure pleasure. They take direction quickly, respond to praise very well, and exhibit fantastic discipline. I say *almost* a pleasure because, well, frankly, they can be unnerving. Imagine a pack of dogs who aren't sniffing at each other, distracted, scratching and licking themselves. Just lined up and sitting at attention, staring at you. I know warforms are essentially natural, but their behavior can be decidedly *un*natural.
- Lacey

- No need for binaries, dear. We simply *are*.
- Plan 9

Despite the seeming simplicity of the product, warform animals are quite expensive. As a pinnacle of what an animal can be, they are literally as close to the perfect creature as you can imagine. Time saved in training and the sheer effectiveness of their performance makes them among the most desirable of security animals, even compared to augmented or paranatural versions. If you face down a security version, you are facing the scariest form of the natural animal you ever will. If it's a pack animal, you are in incredible danger. Integrate equipment, and you're looking at something much scarier than you imagine.

- There's another hidden value in warforms: their genetic material. They are made with the finest stock, so what's inside them can theoretically be reverse engineered. For a bigger payday, though, you want to hit the labs where they keep the genevaults. Row after row of embryos, stem cells, you name it. You could get big bucks just grabbing things at random, but if you do some research and know what you're looking for, you could sell a particular animal's full genetic spectrum, alpha-class stuff, and make a mint.
- Pistons

- I'm not sure I see what the big threat is. I mean, how is a dog more dangerous than a hellhound?
- Riot

- A hellhound *is* dangerous, but it's also harder to control and train, no matter what Lacey or Rainbow tell you. It's got the instincts of a wild animal, and that doesn't lend itself to control very well. Warforms have the benefit of discipline bone-deep, and that makes them smarter and more disciplined. Fire may be dangerous, but a pack of hyper-intelligent dogs with enhanced strength and speed can run you down, nip at you from all angles, trip you, and disarm you.
- Red

WARFORM MODIFICATION

Warforms are genesculpted and biologically modified in vitro, so they are able to possess up to 1 Essence worth of bioware and/or geneware without any impact to their essence. Due to the comparative ease with which modified pluripotent stem cells can be used to integrate genetic modifications into a developing embryo, all geneware added to a warforms has a twenty percent reduction in price. The genetic stock they are created from represents the best of their breed, so two attributes are increased by 1 over the base species. Warforms are so well adapted to the bioware they possess, all bioware and geneware Essence costs are reduced by ten percent. They always have the Domesticated critter power even if the species they are based on does not. Some of the models on the market are included below. These are examples of some of the most commonly used warforms. Their augmentations and known tricks can vary greatly depending on the application for which they were created.

War Hound: These warform dogs are in use extensively with corporate security, border patrols, the mili-

tary, and tactical response teams. They are fast, tough, and loyal to their masters.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
[illegible]	4	4	4	3	2	4	3	3	6.0

Initiative	9 + 2D6
Movement	x2/x8/+4
Condition Monitor	11/10
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 4, Social 5
Armor	0 (8 if wearing critter body armor)
Skills	Intimidation 4, Perception 5 (Smell +2), Running 5, Tracking 6, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Domesticated, Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Smell), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV(STR + 3)P, AP —)
Augmentations	Bone Density R2, Synaptic Acceleration
Note	Common tricks include Armor Use, Attack, Bodyguarding, Companion, Detect (Drugs), Tracking

War Dolphin: One of the areas in which well-trained critters and biodrones are used heavily is in underwater operations. Conventional drones are heavily hampered underwater due to their signal range being heavily reduced. Animals, on the other hand, can operate autonomously and be directed through sonic cues. Dolphins and sea lions are both very popular as trained underwater units. Killer whales are sometimes used for similar purposes, though their size makes their vat growth an expensive undertaking, and they tend to have a vindictive streak when they are stressed.

Warform dolphins are the brightest of the bunch, so much so that they are deemed sapient creatures in some jurisdictions and legally have to be treated as employees rather than property. They are capable of understanding simple spoken language and concepts and can return communication in kind. They are most commonly used around undersea facilities for surveillance, explosive detection, and security. These dolphins are also sometimes used for inspecting undersea pipelines and cables for damage or breaks. They are also capable of leading groups of wild dolphins in order to eject other critters and paracritters from the area they are charged to protect.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
[illegible]									6.0

Initiative	7 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x8/+4
Condition Monitor	13/10
Limits	Physical 10, Mental 6(7), Social 6
Armor	0 (5 if wearing critter body armor)
Skills	Diving 3, Gymnastics 7, Perception 4, Swimming 5, Unarmed Combat 3
Powers	Domesticated, Enhanced Senses (Sonar)
Augmentations	Cerebral booster 1, chameleon skin (dynamic), neuro-retention amplification, tailored critter pheromones 3, vocal range expander
Note	Common tricks include Detect (Explosives), Homing, Patrol

War Horse: These warforms are bred to be tough, strong, have high endurance, and to be less skittish than other horses. They are primarily ridden by riot police, NAN rangers covering terrain too rough for wheeled vehicles, and for medieval fantasy dinner theater.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
[illegible]							4	2	6.0

Initiative	8 + 1D6
Movement	x3/x10/+6
Condition Monitor	13/10
Limits	Physical 10(11), Mental 5, Social 6
Armor	0 (12 if wearing critter body armor)
Skills	Running 6(7), Unarmed Combat 1
Powers	Domesticated, Natural Weapon (Kick: DV(STR + 1)P, AP —, Reach 1)
Augmentations	Bone density 1, muscle augmentation 1, Neo-EPO
Note	Common tricks include Armor Use and Mount

IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

Once considered a subset of warforms, biodrones have evolved into their own industry. They are distinctly different than warforms in numerous ways, the most obvious being that they possess extensive 'ware and they cannot be trained but are instead piloted through implants. This is the kind of tech that makes ecoterrorists froth with rage. You take an animal, stuff it full of 'ware until it loses its mind, and then throw in some more 'ware that lets you control it like a puppet.

- Disgusting.
- Ecotope

- And pointless! Why drone an animal? I don't have to feed my drones.
- Clockwork

Biodrones experienced their renaissance in the late '60s as a hot new security option that combined the best of living animal instincts and the direct control of a drone through a local security spider. Results were encouraging at the outset, but time showed that their primary advantage was their novelty. Once the chinks in their armor were uncovered, sales tanked, and several megas scrapped their programs entirely in favor of other security animal options. Those who stuck with the project looked for other avenues of use.

- So what are these weaknesses?
- Riot

- The biggest is that their augmentations drove the animals insane. The only thing keeping them in check was the STIRRUP system that connected them to the rigger. If you could disrupt the signal with ECM or scramblers, they went berserk. They're still dangerous as hell, seeing as the STIRRUP is also an integral move-by-wire system, along with all the other crap they jammed in there, but without coordination they lost a lot of combat effectiveness, meaning they might just run off or rampage around the place they were meant to protect.
- Pistons

- They still see use in some places, mostly mid-level facilities that can afford to support them but have enough redundant signal to prevent easy hacking.
- DangerSensei

In recent years, the market trend in biodrones has partially moved away from fully cyberizing animals, at least for combat. In many cases it would be more cost effective to simply use a drone, and heavy augmentation to critters eliminates many of the benefits of using a critter in the first place. Indeed, most research shows that biodrones marry the worst aspects of augmentation and animals together instead of the best, making the process a wash, if you're lucky. Instead, researchers have focused on creating biodrones that can do what regular drones cannot. Spying and surveillance are the prime use of biodrones. Animals such as pigeons, squirrels, and cockroaches are so ubiquitous in the sprawl that most people don't even notice their presence, let alone suspect they are wired with audio- and video-recording enhancements.

- Back when they had the Seattle arcology, Renraku was experimenting with a kind of biodrone devil rat. They would have provided mobile surveillance all over the area, even emergency attack via swarm tactics. It never panned out. The rats' dual nature meant augmentation drove them nuts and made them deathly sick.
- Baka Dabora

- Thank goodness they never got it right. Can you imagine how much worse the arcology could have been if Deus had a legion of droned devil rats?
- Winterhawk

- That's presumptuous of you.
- Puck

- Which part?
- Winterhawk

- Every part.
- Puck

This practice remained relatively unknown for a couple years, with the corps using the new techniques to get an edge instead of playing their hand and going for sales. When they finally hit the market, their sales were solid, seeing use in espionage and counter-espionage, security, and in some cases military scouting. Some of the more esoteric uses included droned pets that could act as light security and give someone under protection another layer of observation.

- Aztechnology made use of these in Bogata, sending in almost perfectly camouflaged birds to act as spotters for artillery fire. The fact that they were alive meant they were harder to spot in the astral than a drone, and by the time the shamans could make out the 'ware, it was too late.
- Picador

The second wave of development has been far more controversial. These biodrones are suicide bombers, implanted with explosives or other self-destruct devices to act like living, seeking, disguised grenades. While terrifying in implication, in truth the expense makes these homing beasts something of a rarity. The sheer expense of such a creature, and the limited suicide material that can be packed inside without ruining the stealth or mobility of the drone, means that these assassin biodrones see very exclusive use by the most well-funded of clients, and only against the most deserving of targets.

- It's quite surprising just how much high explosive you need to exit a bomb pigeon and get, say, a two-meter radius. And the weight means the damn thing is flapping like hell and wobbling around. Hardly inconspicuous to a watchful bodyguard. Ground-bound biodrone assassins are much more reliable, but also a bit more likely to be spotted. For all their unwieldy movement, bird bombs are usually successful for one simple reason: People don't look up.
- Beaker

- It's much more effective when the biodrone uses non-explosive means of attack. Not standard tooth and claw, mind, but poison injectors and gasses. You can pack a cyber rat with Seven-7 and have it crawl right into the target's bedroom and gas them in their sleep. Or you put a poison injector in their teeth and have them bite. Just a quick peck can deliver enough Green Ring 8 or ekylbene venom to put down a troll.
- Balladeer

- The real advantage is that you can make a perfectly harmless looking animal into an envenomed monstrosity. With enough advance planning, you can replace the family dog with a biodrone version, force-growth cloned and fully implanted, ready to be rigged or programmed. Their dog goes into the vet, your dog comes out. Easy.
- Marcos

- What happens when it accidentally nips the kids?
- Sunshine

The fact is, biodrones have moved into highly niche markets. Of all their qualities, there are only a couple of things they can do well, but those are roles that no other drone or animal could accomplish. This specialization makes them very expensive, but the quality of performance speaks for itself and keeps biodrone programs moving, even if they only cater to exceptionally wealthy clients and megacorporate interests.

- It's not impossible to keep a biodrone as a shadowrunner, but it's way more expensive than it's worth. You need specialized equipment and programs just to run them, they show much less initiative than you'd think, and they are one glitch away from tearing you to pieces or suffering sudden cardiac arrest or, more likely, lethal grand mal seizures. Their 'ware is almost impossible to repair on a budget, their medical needs are exotic, and maybe worst of all, they have no personality. You can get a Rottweiler with a pneumatic jaw and it'll probably still love you. A biodrone just … sits there. Waiting. And that's not just an expensive boondoggle, it's kinda sad.
- Rainbow

- In other words, this has been a warning not to trust animals around corporate enclaves?
- 2XL

- I always knew those chipmunks in the arcologies were too cute.
- Riot

- Haven't you been reading? This whole document proves you can't trust animals *anywhere.*
- Sounder

- So, no different from anything else, then?
- The Smiling Bandit

CRITTER AUGMENTATION

Decades of corporate research and development have gone into the study and implementation of augmentation on animals. Originally it was performed for clinical trials leading to later application in human subjects, but the corps are never willing to let a potentially profitable line of research go untapped.

Early on, when implementing simple cyberlimbs on mundane animals that had been injured, it was discovered that the critter's personality changed drastically. Former loving pets became aggressive, skittish, and erratic. It was determined that non-sapient critters do not adapt as well as metahumans to change in their physiology and neurochemistry, resulting in acute psychological scarring.

With paracritters, the impact on their personality and behavior is even more pronounced. The impact of augmentations on a critter's Magic and Resonance abilities makes augmented paracritters all but uncontrollable with more than minimal augmentation.

Junkyard Dog: This biodrone is specialized for area denial and manhunting. It can be released to patrol a facility using its TRACES system to access all areas of an otherwise tightly locked-down facility.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
5	4	4(6)	4	4	3	2	4	3	1.15

Initiative	9 + 2D6
Movement	x2/x8/+4
Condition Monitor	11/12
Limits	Physical 6, Mental 6, Social 6
Armor	2 (12 if wearing critter body armor)
Skills	Intimidate 4, Perception 5 (Smell +2), Running 5, Tracking 6, Unarmed Combat 5
Powers	Domesticated, Enhanced Senses (Hearing, Smell), Natural Weapon (Bite: DV(STR + 3)P, AP –6)
Weaknesses	CI3D
Augmentations	Bone lacing (aluminum), CAST w/ friend or foe recognition, junkyard jaw, platelet factories, SEIS, TRACES, synaptic booster 1
Note	Common tricks include Armor Use, Patrol, SEIS Training, and Tracking
Cost	225,000¥
Availability	20F

SkySpy: This biodrone is a common crow modified for surveillance and as a low-profile data courier. A much larger version of this biodrone with the same capabilities as well as the ability to fly at high altitudes for an extended period of time is based on the California condor and is dubbed the RECONdor (use eagle for base stats instead of a crow). Various types of birds have been used in the past as surveillance biodrones. Originally pigeons were the preferred template, but numerous complaints of these expensive little biodrones being eaten by cats, hawks, and other wild predators caused trends to shift to another common urban bird that is less vulnerable.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
2	3	2	1	2	1	5	3	2	5.3

Initiative	7 + 1D6
Movement	x2/x4/+4 (x3/x6/+5 flight)
Condition Monitor	7/9
Limits	Physical 2, Mental 9, Social 5
Armor	0
Skills	Flight 6, Perception 4, Unarmed Combat 2
Powers	Gestalt Consciousness
Weaknesses	Fragile (2)
Augmentations	Commlink, cybereyes (Rating 2, w/ low-light vision, thermographic vision, vision magnification, vision enhancement 2), data lock 6, orientation goad
Note	Common tricks include Homing, Patrol. Reach –1
Cost	30,000¥
Availability	16R

Roachdrone: A bug bug—that is, an insect that can transmit audio and video recordings. People tend to squish bugs if they see them indoors, so be conscious of where and how they are implemented.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
1	2	5	0	2	—	7	—	2	0

Initiative	5 + 2D6
Movement	x2/x8/+4
Condition Monitor	1/1
Limits	Physical 2, Mental 2, Social 3
Armor	0
Skills	Gymnastics 3, Sneaking 4, Perception 2
Powers	Gestalt Consciousness, Wall Walking
Weaknesses	Extra Fragile
Augmentations	CAST
Note	Cannot be taught Tricks.
Cost	25,000¥
Availability	14R

Cybertooth Tiger: This hunter-killer biodrone allows a biorigger to carry out frighteningly fast hit-and-run attacks. An entire squad can be picked off one by one with little more than a scream and the telltale shimmer of a cloaked predator before a deadly silence returns.

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	EDG	ESS
6 (7)	5 (6)	4 (7)	5 (6)	3	2	4	3	3	1.03

Initiative	15 + 3D6
Movement	x2/x6/+4
Condition Monitor	12/10
Limits	Physical 7(9), Mental 4, Social 4
Armor	0 (10 if wearing critter body armor)
Skills	Perception 5, Running 5, Sneaking 6, Tracking 4, Unarmed Combat 7
Powers	Low-light Vision
Weaknesses	CI3D, CTLE-X
Augmentations	Bone density 2, chameleon pelt 4, skilljack 4, stirrup interface 2, suprathyroid gland
Note	Common tricks include Attack.
Cost	600,000¥
Availability	25F

CRITTER CYBERWARE

CHAMELEON PELT

A bit of a combination of the skin toner and fibre optic hair cosmetic cyberware available to metahumans, this augmentation replaces the critter's hair follicles with ruthenium polymer filaments and installs a chameleon processor unit that adjusts the color of the fur in real time. This allows the critter to blend in to its surroundings and virtually disappear. The chameleon pelt imparts a *negative* dice pool modifier of (Rating + 2) to visual Perception tests to spot the critter. This augmentation is compatible with skin modifications that provide armor, such as dermal plating or orthoskin.

COMPUTER-ASSISTED SENSORY TRANSLATION (CAST)

Computer-assisted sensory translation (CAST) is the equivalent of a rigger interface for biodrones. It allows the rigger to jump in to a biodrone and not only control them through AR commands but experience the animal's senses through a wireless connection. This technology circumvents the greatest obstacle in biodrone development—the inability of traditional simsense interfaces and the metahuman mind to process an animal's raw senses.

CAST tackles this problem by tapping the sensory centers of the animal's cortex, allowing the biodrone to transmit real-time sensory and rigging information feeds. Identifying sensory stimuli in the brain, a CAST unit reads and translates data into comprehensible simsense data. This technique allows the rigger to make use of an animal's enhanced senses, such as an eagle's sharp eyesight or a bloodhound's enhanced sense of smell.

SPECIAL AUGMENTATION NOTES FOR CRITTERS

- Bone density affects the toughness of a critter's teeth but not their claws, as they are composed of keratin and not bones.
- Bone lacing includes reinforcing the teeth in critters.
- Hand razors can be installed in a critter that already has claws. It replaces those claws and changes the damage accordingly.
- Spurs are unable to be used with the legs of a quadruped, however the raptor foot augmentation is compatible.
- Tooth and claw caps coat existing teeth and claws or repair broken ones with titanium (cost: 500 nuyen). Note that this does not reinforce the root, so teeth and claws may be ripped out in combat. If this happens, Essence is lost when repairing the damage with cybernetic equivalents.
- Cortex bombs, particularly the area-bomb variety, are used in suicide assassination biodrones and are generally installed in the body cavity of the animal rather than the head.

The system can also interpret senses that metahumans normally do not possess such as a migratory bird's direction sense or a shark's electromagnetic sense. Software then reinterprets this sensory data into a form that makes sense to the rigger, such as multicolored ARO overlays or icons.

The simsense data the CAST system generates is two-way. Commands from the rigger are translated into sensory experiences that trigger predictable behavior from the animal. The illusory smell of food and a sense of hunger can be projected to steer a biodrone in a certain direction. A target marked as a target by the rigger will be perceived as prey. The system may even be programmed to activate certain cues based on simple vocal commands. An advanced CAST package, available on demand, expands the CAST system with a friend-or-foe recognition system.

While much research has gone into the process, there have been no successful trials of a CAST system interpreting a paracritter's astral sight, as there is no identified region of the brain that controls this ability.

ORIENTATION GOAD

The most economical method of direct control is a simple cyberimplant that "destabilizes" the biodrone's orientation by changing the balance of the inner ear. The biodrone reacts instinctively to the change by turning, moving forward or backward, up or down. Thus, the direction in which the drone moves can be crudely

controlled by a security rigger. The goad comes with an integral wireless microtransceiver with a range of 100 meters. While this system is not optimized for combat, orientation goads are the ideal method of control for discreet recon and surveillance biodrones, such as cyber-augmented insects or birds (including the RECondor). This minute implant has the added benefit of being less invasive than more advanced control systems, and consequently implanted animals show less signs of aggressive behavior and psychological trauma.

This incredibly cheap and simple device is used to crudely control the movements and direction of an animal by destabilizing the animal's sense of orientation. The animal is forced to move in a given direction or change directions to compensate for the destabilization. This degree of control is sufficient to guide the animal in a general direction, but insufficient for most complex or combat maneuvers, or fine control of any kind. Controlling a biodrone in this fashion is a Simple Action using the biodrone's relevant Skill + Attribute with a limit of the biodrone's Physical limit or the Data Processing of the device from which you are sending the command, whichever is lower.

STIRRUP INTERFACE

The most advanced control method uses sophisticated move-by-wire technology to ensure direct control. Known as a stirrup interface, it includes rigger control adaptation. This extraordinary system allows full sensory immersion and rigger control of the biodrone and also enhances the unit's reflexes and motion control significantly. The catch is this technology is expensive and not suited for large scale application.

This interface is based on an advanced move-by-wire system (p. 84, *Chrome Flesh*) and provides all of the same bonuses and benefits, including the embedded skillwire system. Additionally, it adds a remote control-rig adaptation that allows a rigger to monitor the exact movements of the animal as well as to jump in and control it directly through full-immersion VR. The subject animal may make full use of its own faculties and skills, except when the rigger is jumped in. A rigger jumped into the recipient uses their own skills with a -1 dice pool modifier and the critter's limits when performing any actions. The rigger can use activesofts loaded through the biodrone's skilljack system at no penalty if such a system is implanted in the biodrone as well. The recipient can be controlled by a specialized Pilot program, but if it is, it functions exactly like a regular drone.

SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENT INTERACTION EXPERT SYSTEM (SEIS)

SEIES is a common tactical implant that ties a biodrone into a facility's defense network or a military unit network. The SEIES provides updated information on the location of friendlies, their firing arcs, sensor contact with the enemy, and defense installation status; when combined with an implanted commlink, CAST implant or a stirrup interface, the information is translated into simple sim-perceptions that the animal intelligence can process.

If installed at a relatively young age, animals will grow up with a natural understanding of these foreign impressions. Given enough time, an animal can learn to use SEIES to manipulate its environment. It can use it to open and close doors, switch other defense systems on and off, or perform similar tasks. This amount of control allows the animal to freely move through its habitat, or in the case of an experienced predator, to reconfigure the maze it is kept in when hunting intruders. The biodrone may trigger any function linked to the network (such as an alarm, opening or closing a door) as a Free Action. Further, it may add + 2 to any Surprise Tests (including ambushing). A combat biodrone equipped with both SEIES and TRACES can use its environment to devastating effect, preparing ambushes and potentially separating team members from the rest of the group.

TACTICAL RECOGNITION AND ANALYTICAL CAPABILITY EXPERT SYSTEM (TRACES)

While most animals can routinely beat a computer in recognizing other animals or metahumans, they aren't able to readily identify man-made objects and their functions, be they weapons, buttons and switches, or potential recon targets. TRACES tries to solve this problem. The system employs advanced image-recognition software linked to an optical feed (typically cybereyes, or a mounted camera). TRACES then uses the implanted commlink, CAST implant, or stirrup interface to translate directions into behavioral guidance. For instance, as a recon biodrone approaches a target, TRACES identifies the intruder and either equates it with food/home/comfort (to move the drone closer), or with danger if the intent is for the biodrone to move away. The preceding example uses crude, simple impressions; by overlaying multiple complimentary impressions, quite complex behavior can be generated, effectively allowing the animal to use its own natural abilities to deal efficiently with situations that would normally be alien to it. In game terms, a TRACES-equipped biodrone can be treated like a tactically trained metahuman in regards to its behavior in combat (e.g., avoiding heavily armed opposition, staying out of firearm range, using cover, recognizing the magician and staying out of line of sight, and so forth). Further, the animal is capable of recognizing doors, simple switches, and similar features, and it understands how to use them. Note that this system works both ways—if the animal "naturally" detects and identifies a threat, this information is shared with the system, which enhances its perfor-

SPECIAL BIODRONE CYBERWARE

CYBERWARE	ESSENCE	AVAILABILITY	COST
Chameleon Pelt (Rating 1-4)	0.3 x Rating	20F	6,000¥ x Rating
CAST	0.5	25	25,000¥
+ Friend or Foe Recognition	—	+1	5,000¥
Orientation Goad	0.1	4	500¥
Stirrup Interface Rating 1	3.2	15R	45,000¥
Stirrup Interface Rating 2	4.2	21R	135,000¥
Stirrup Interface Rating 3	5.2	28R	220,000¥
TRACES	0.7	25F	25,000¥
SEIES	0.7	25F	20,000¥

mance. TRACES also grants a biodrone + 2 dice bonus for any Melee Combat Tests and all defense tests.

INTEGRATING CRITTERS INTO YOUR GAME

TRAINING

Training a critter can be difficult and time consuming. Still, having a well-trained animal at your side can offer considerable benefits.

STEP 1: CHOOSE A CRITTER

The difficulty in training a critter can vary wildly depending on the nature of the critter in question and its history. Consult the Animal Training Table below and determine what modifier, if any, applies to the critter you plan to train.

STEP 2: DETERMINE NUMBER OF TRICKS CRITTER CAN LEARN AND SET THRESHOLD OF TEST

The number of tricks a critter is capable of learning is limited to the critter's Logic. Domesticated (see Chapter 12, **Game Information**) critters have been bred to work well with metahumans and can learn Tricks equal to twice their Logic. Teaching a trick is an Extended Animal Handling Test with a starting threshold of 3. The threshold to teach a Domesticated critter a trick is lowered by 1. Teaching tricks to paracritters is more difficult than teaching them to mundane critters, raising the threshold by 1. Critters and paracritters with extensive 'ware become emotionally unstable and very difficult to train; raising the threshold by 1 for every point of Essence loss is appropriate. Chimerics tend to be erratic with a short attention span, making them difficult to train as well. Chimerics should increase the threshold by at least 2.

ANIMAL TRAINING TABLE

SITUATION	POOL MODIFIER
Mundane Critter	+0
Paracritter	–2
Chimeric critter	–3
Domesticated	+2
Critter Essence	–1 per 0.5 Essence lost
Critter raised around metahumans	+0
Critter raised in the wild	–2
Critter treated poorly by metahumans in the past	–2
Critter treated well by metahumans in the past	+1
Animal sees you as potential prey	–2
Pack/herd animal	+1
Solitary animal	–1
Using animal training equipment	+0
No training equipment	–2

STEP 3: ASSERT YOUR DOMINANCE

To begin training a critter, you must first be recognized by the critter as dominant. Make an Animal Handling + Charisma test opposed by the critter's Willpower x 3, or in the case of Domesticated critters Willpower x 2. If the test is successful, you may begin teaching the critter a trick; if you are unsuccessful, you must wait twenty-four hours to attempt the test again.

STEP 4: CHOOSE A CUE

When training a critter, you must choose a particular type of cue with which to issue commands for the critter to perform a particular trick. These can vary greatly, and their effectiveness can also vary considerably from species to species. Dogs, with their sharp hearing, respond well to auditory cues such as spoken command words. Birds generally have sharp eyesight and respond well to hand signals. Keep in mind that an animal trained with auditory cues can be a disadvantage in stealth missions, and an animal trained with hand signals must be in line of sight to command. Many trainers choose to use both auditory cues and hand signals in combination so that the animal can be controlled in all situations. An animal that has been trained to use both types of cues in conjunction can be commanded with either a hand signal or auditory signal alone, though the trainer has a -2 dice pool modifier when issuing commands in this way.

STEP 5: TRAINING

Teaching a trick is an Extended Animal Handling Test (3), with an interval of 2 weeks. Various modifiers can affect a trainer's ability to control and teach an animal depending on a variety of factors, such as the nature of the critter and your treatment of it. Consult the Animal Training Table for details.

Training critters can be risky, especially if the critter is dangerous. On a critical glitch, a critter with a higher Body or Strength than you will attempt to attack the trainer, and a critter with a lower Body and Strength will attempt to run away. In either case, the trainer must assert their dominance as described above once again before they can continue teaching the trick.

When all trick "slots" have been used, the critter can be taught no more. One trick can replace another if the trainer desires, but it requires a retraining period that doubles the time it takes to learn the new trick. Once the new skill is learned, the old trick is lost.

Juvenile critters cost twice as much as fully grown ones due to the fact that they prove easier to train upon reaching adulthood if the time has been spent making them accustomed to human interaction.

STEP 6: USING TRICKS

Commanding an animal to use a particular trick is a Simple Action requiring an Animal Handling + Charisma test with a threshold of 1.

TRICKS

Tricks describe capabilities a critter can learn that work to serve metahuman needs. Additional tricks may be available at the gamemaster's discretion.

Armor Use: This represents the training required to teach a critter to wear man-made armor without penalties from distraction or interference.

Attack: The critter is trained to attack targets the handler directs them to attack.

Assist: The animal is trained to assist the handler in simple tasks, such as picking up objects, opening doors, or crossing the street. This trick is primarily for critters owned by those with physical handicaps.

Bodyguarding: The critter is trained to follow and guard the trainer or another individual the trainer designates.

Companion: This "trick" is actually a set of tricks, basic trained behaviors that make an animal useful as a companion. This includes but is not limited to things like sit, stay, heel, and don't poop in the house.

Detect [Category]: The critter is trained to use their natural and enhanced senses to find and point out bombs, drugs, and, with Awakened critters, even magic.

Herding: The critter is trained to direct a target the way their handler commands. The critter intimidates a target through barks, growls, roars, or feigned attacks. In doing so, the target is forced in a direction of the handler's choosing.

Homing: The critter is trained to return to a certain location if not under the guidance of its master or another metahuman.

Mount: The critter is trained to have a rider and follow their basic directions (walk, stop, left, right, etc.) without an Animal Handling test. More complex tasks (and any test during combat) require Animal Handling tests or the relevant trick.

Patrol: The critter is trained to protect a certain object or area as designated by the trainer. They first attempt to Intimidate any intruders they encounter; if the intruder doesn't back off, the critter attacks them using whatever means are at its disposal.

Retrieve: The critter is trained to track down and retrieve certain objects. The trainer can either point to an object within line of sight for the critter to retrieve or show the critter a particular object and then direct them to an area to search for a similar object. The success of the latter method varies greatly depending on the intelligence of the animal.

SEIS Training: A critter with the SEIS augmentation can be trained to use it to navigate a facility and use the facility's automated defenses to its benefit. A SEIS-

equipped animal that was raised in a particular facility from the time it was young does not need this training to use the system's capabilities. However, an animal that has SEIS installed when fully grown or an animal that is moved to a new facility that it does not have experience with requires this type of training to be able to use the new facility's systems.

Skill Improvement: Represents training to refine skills a critter already has. Increase a skill the critter has by 1 rank. This trick does not count against the critter's total tricks. You cannot raise a critter's skill higher than the trainer's ranks in Handle Animal or the skill in question.

Skill Use: Represents training in a skill a critter does not normally possess. These skills include Escape Artist, Gymnastics, Perception, Performance, Running, Sneaking, Survival, Tracking, and Unarmed Combat. A critter that can astrally perceive can be taught Assensing and Astral Combat. An animal cannot be taught a skill they physically cannot perform. For example, a dolphin cannot learn the Running Skill.

Tracking: The critter has been trained to use its keen natural Tracking skills at its master's command.

Trigger Training: The critter has been trained to use one of its trained abilities as if a trainer commanded it when a trigger is set off. Triggers can come in many forms but most most commonly used triggers are ultrasonic tones, specific scents, or specific visual cues. The trainer need not be present for the animal to react to these cues.

Barding and Brutality: The same tech used to create lightweight yet durable armored clothing for metahumans is sometimes applied to domesticated animals including dogs, horses, and a few others. It is a relatively common sight in the more affluent areas of the Seattle sprawl to see a dog being walked wearing a chem-resistant pooch coat to protect them on days where the acid rain is particularly bad. Many ranchers still keep to the old traditions and ride horses to herd cattle. They have had to adapt to the hazards of the Sixth World, however, outfitting their horses with armored barding that gives the horse a fighting chance if some nasty paracritters try to make it a meal. Police dogs are routinely outfitted with heavy body armor as a sensible response to a highly armed criminal element.

Critter Body Armor: Only critters who have been trained with the Armor Use trick are able to wear Critter Body Armor. The maximum armor rating any critter can wear without penalty is equal to the critter's Body – 3 if flying or swimming, or Body + 3 if on the ground. Otherwise armor penalties for critters function the same as they do for metahumans. Critter Body Armor stacks with a critter's natural armor. Critter Body Armor must be specially made for the specific species and fitted to their size. It can accept the following armor modifications for the standard cost: Chemical Protection, Concealed Pocket, Drag Handle, Electrochromic Clothing, Fire Resistance, Insulation, Nonconductivity, Thermal Damping.

VETERINARY CARE

In a world where your next-door neighbor could have horns, a tail, and fur, doctors have had to expand their skills to accommodate a much wider variety of physiologies. Applying those skills to a critter just isn't much of a stretch. Any skills in the Biotech skill group can be used with critters at no penalty. "Veterinary" can be selected as a specialization for the Medicine skill, granting the standard +2 bonus when applicable.

Critter Earphones: These allow a trainer to giver verbal commands remotely and protect critters with sensitive hearing from extremely loud noises. Only critters who have been trained with the Armor Use trick are able to wear critter earphones. These earphones are produced for a wide variety of critters and can accept the following modifications: Audio Enhancement, Sound Link, and Spatial Recognizer.

Critter Goggles: These can be extremely useful in controlling critters trained to recognize visual cues and to protect the eyes of critters in combat or other hazardous environments. Only critters who have been trained with the Armor Use trick are able to wear critter goggles. These goggles are produced for a wide variety of critters and can accept the following modifications: flare compensation, image link, low-light vision, and vision enhancement. It should be noted that critters cannot be trained to understand and use AROs. These goggles have a capacity equal to their rating.

Sensor Collar: This collar comes equipped with a Rating 2 camera and omnidirectional microphone, providing surveillance information to the handler of the animal's surroundings. It also allows the critter's location to be tracked via GPS. In jurisdictions where critters or certain species of critters are required to be registered, this collar can broadcast the animal's registration information.

Training Kit: While the nature of this equipment varies from animal to animal, certain accessories are extremely helpful in training a critter, especially the more complex tricks. These accessories include things like treats, leashes, collars, whips, attack targets, and other similar things.

CRITTER GEAR

GEAR	AVAILABILITY	COST
Critter Body Armor	6	50¥ per point of Armor
Critter Earphones	3	50¥ x Rating (1–6)
Critter Goggles	3	50¥ x Rating (1–6)
Sensor Collar	2	200¥
Training Kit	1	250¥

CRITTERS WEARING ARMOR

Shapeshifters in their animal form can wear Critter Body Armor and other critter gear, though they will need help putting it on. They do not require special training to wear the armor but are otherwise subject to the standard rules outlined here.

GHOST HOUNDS

While genetic manipulation has been unable to replicate any magical abilities in animals, there has been some limited success in using traditional stock breeding and culling methods to produce a genetic line of dogs that are far more likely than average to exhibit some ability to perceive magic auras and sometimes even perceive the astral. These dogs, dubbed ghost hounds, are highly sought after as guard animals. Most ghost hounds have the ability to sense magical auras that functions similar to the adept Magic Sense power (p. 172, *Street Grimoire*). The rarest of the breed have full Astral Perception. They have the same traits and abilities as a mundane dog, however Ghost Hounds with Astral Perception have 1 rank of the Assensing skill and are almost always trained to improve this skill. Because of the intense breeding required to manifest these abilities, ghost hounds can never be modified with chimeric or warform genetic enhancements. In addition, any Essence loss destroys their ability to sense magic.

NEW CRITTER POWERS

Domesticated: Domesticated critters have been bred to work well with metahumans and can learn tricks equal to twice their Logic. In addition, the threshold to teach a Domesticated critter a trick is lowered by 1.

Gliding: The critter has flaps of skin, semi-functional wings, or some other feature that allows it to glide short distances. Creatures with the Gliding ability always have at least one rank in the Free-Fall skill. Critters use Agility instead of Body when using the Free-Fall skill to glide, because it is more about the fine motor reflexes than pure physicality. A gliding critter can avoid falling damage from any distance with a Free-Fall + Agility [Physical] (2) Test. While falling, they can choose to travel up to twice the distance horizontally that they fall vertically. In one Combat Turn, a gliding critter falls ten meters (no gliding up!) and can move up to twenty meters horizontally.

Vestigial Wings: Common in chimeric creatures where wings are genetically grafted into a species that does not have them, these wings are insufficient for true flight due to the lack of appropriate musculature and low body weight found in flying critters. They are not without benefit however. If a creature with Vestigial Wings should happen to fall, reduce the effective distance of a fall by four meters when calculating the falling damage (p. 172, *SR5*) and you receive a +2 dice pool modifier on jumping tests (p. 134-135, *SR5*).

NEW CRITTER WEAKNESSES

Critter Cyberpsychosis: A condition commonly affecting a mundane critter with 5 or more Essence loss from augmentation or a paracritter with 3 or more essence loss from augmentation. The augmentations performed on a creature have proven to be too much for a critter, leaving it broken psychologically. The critter reacts in a hostile manner to any living thing near it and rages against captivity. The critter will try to the best of its ability to harm any living thing it can reach (even its own kind) and to escape any captivity.

CI3D (Critter Implant Induced Immune Deficiency): A condition commonly affecting a mundane critter with 4 or more essence lost to augmentation or a paracritter with 2 or more essence lost to augmentation. The afflicted critter suffers a dice pool modifier of -2 on all Body Tests to resist the effects of diseases, drugs, toxins, and other compounds.

CTLE-X (Critter Temporal Lobe Epilepsy): This condition causes seizures due to the neurological and physiological stress extensive augmentation puts on the critter. This condition is possible with any extensive cyberware (4 or more essence lost to augmentation), but especially with the Stirrup Interface. Whenever the critter or a rigger controlling the critter through electronic control such as a Stirrup Interface rolls a glitch (p. 45, *SR5*), the critter must make a Body + Willpower (4) Test or fall into epileptic seizures for (5 - hits) minutes. If the critter experiences a CTLE-X episode while a rigger is jumped in, the Stirrup system will automatically disconnect the rigger from the biodrone as a protective measure to avoid severe biofeedback.

Dietary Requirement (Tailored Nutrition): Many highly modified critters require specialized diets. Sometimes this is a side effect of extensive genetic modification, while other times this is due to intentional alteration as a kind of product control. Genetically engineered critters that are not sterile by creation always possess this dietary requirement to prevent them from breeding in the wild and disrupting the ecosystem. Of course, selling specialized food for a critter is quite profitable to the corps as well.

Precarious Physiology: Due to their heavily modified genetics, chimeric critters have immuno-suppressive problems with cybernetic implants. Double all Essence losses caused by cyberware. Bioware implants, regardless of how they are grown or designed, are rejected by the chimeric's body.

GAME INFORMATION

Below is a list of new critter powers, followed by an index of all critter and spirit powers in *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition*.

ADAPTIVE COLORATION

Type: P **Action:** Auto
Range: Self **Duration:** Always

The critter can change its color to match its surroundings, allowing it to hide better. As long as it stands still, the critter gains a bonus to not be spotted. If the critter has a Magic rating, the Magic Rating x 2 becomes a negative dice pool modifier on Perception tests to detect it by sight. If the critter lacks Magic Rating, then its Intuition x 2 becomes the negative dice pool modifier. Since the critter is tough to spot, any ranged attacks against it suffer a -2 dice pool penalty.

Critters with this power are also skilled at Sneaking. They can roll Agility + Intuition (2) Test, using any net hits as a positive dice pool modifier for Sneaking tests.

This power works against normal and theormographic vision, but not any non-visual senses, including sonar, radar, or astral perception.

AGONY

Type: P or M **Action:** Auto
Range: Self **Duration:** Always

Whether it's a venom, magical fire, corrosive spit, or just bad breath, the critter's attacks are especially painful. Whenever the critter inflicts boxes of Physical damage, note the number of boxes inflicted. Until the same number of boxes of Physical damage are healed, the victim suffers double the dice pool modifier due to injuries on both the Physical and Stun Condition Monitors. This doubling is calculated before any pain resistance or similar abilities are applied.

ALIENATE

Type: P **Action:** None
Range: LOS **Duration:** Sustained

The target is phased slightly into the astral plane—not enough to be targeted by astral beings, but enough to have trouble interacting with the physical world. All Active Skill Tests made by the victim take a negative dice pool modifier equal to the Magic Rating of the spirit. This also applies to those interacting with the victim, which can be good or bad: Sure, it affects those security guard's Clubs tests and the Perception test of that motion sensor, but it also makes it harder for the DocWagon guy's First Aid test and for that van driver to realize there's someone in her path.

ASTRAL VENOM

Type: M **Action:** Auto
Range: Self **Duration:** Always

The spirit makes an especially dangerous connection with the magician (or perhaps it's the other way around). When the spirit is dismissed, is disrupted by damage, or otherwise departs service, the magician who summoned it suffers a number of boxes of Stun damage equal to half the spirit's Magic rating. This damage cannot be resisted.

BRACHIATION

Type: P **Action:** Auto
Range: Self **Duration:** Always

It flies through the air with the greatest of ease. The critter can get around by swinging from grip to grip. As long as there are plentiful hand-holds (or tentacle-holds, or what have you), the critter can move at a walking, running, or sprinting speed while swinging, using the rules for those movement speeds. If there are few hand-holds (or what have you), the critter's brachiation speed is halved.

CONTROL FOCUS

Type: P **Action:** Auto
Range: Special **Duration:** Special

This power gives a critter special powers over a focus it is possessing. They may activate the focus without any action from the owner, or they may manipulate its power. They can reduce the Force of the focus by any number of points up to their Magic Rating, or increase it by a number of points equal to half their Magic Rating (rounded up). The suppression may last as however long the critter wishes, as long as it still possesses the focus. The power increase can only by used by (critter's Force) Combat Turns per day.

CREATE ALCHERA

Type: M **Action:** Complex
Range: LOS **Duration:** Sustained

The critter can materialize a small alchera, following the rules for materialized alchera (p. 29, *Street Grimoire*). The alchera leads to the metaplane of the critter's choosing, usually their home metaplane. These alchera are no larger than (Force x 100) square meters. Once the critter is out of sight of the alchera or stops sustaining it, it disappears, which is a tremendous inconvenience for anyone who inadvertently wandered into it.

DARKNESS

Type: P **Action:** Complex
Range: LOS **Duration:** Sustained

Sometimes, that sudden shadow isn't just a cloud hiding the sun. Critters with this power can perform a Magic + Willpower (3) Test to create a sphere of reduced illumination. This sphere has a maximum radius of (Magic) meters. Each hit on the test moves visibility a line down on the Light/Glare portion of the Environmental Modifiers table (p. 175, *SR5*). Failure to generate net hits means they simply emanate a dark mist that does not actively interfere with visibility.

DEATHLOCK

Type: P **Action:** Auto
Range: Self **Duration:** Always

Damage caused by the critter leaves a lingering effect. Make an extra mark in each box of Physical damage caused by this critter's attacks. Each of these boxes count as two boxes of damage for the purposes of healing only—count each deathlocked box of damage as a single box for wound penalties, total damage taken, knockdown, and so on. If a deathlocked box is healed by only one box of healing, it becomes a box of normal damage.

DIVE ATTACK

Type: P **Action:** Complex
Range: Touch **Duration:** Instant

The critter swoops or drops on the target, using a gravity assist to cause havoc. The critter makes a normal attack (usually an Unarmed Combat Test) and adds the number of meters fallen to its normal damage (usually Unarmed damage).

EMPATHY

Type: M **Action:** Auto
Range: LOS **Duration:** Always

This power gives the critter an affinity for all beings, be they sentient or non. The critter gets its Magic rating as a dice pool modifier to all Social Tests, and its Social limit is increased by its Magic.

ENERGY AURA

Type: P **Action:** Auto
Range: Self **Duration:** Always

This critter is surrounded by a field of damaging energy, which can take the form of fire, electricity, intense cold, or the like. The power has a specific element type—for example, spirits of fire have Energy Aura (Fire). The critter adds its Magic to the Damage Value of any melee attack it makes. If the damage has a specific elemental component (like our fire spirit from a couple sentences ago), the elemental effect also applies—check out the convenient sidebar for where to find a lot of different elements.

Radiation works somewhat differently than other elemental effects. Coming into contact with a critter with Energy Aura (Radiation) is the same as coming into contact with a Harsh radiation environment. The radiation levels drop off the farther away you get: Moderate within 10 meters and Mild within 20 meters. The critter also leaves areas of Mild radiation wherever it goes which dissipate ten minutes after the critter moves on. More information on radiation environments can be found on p. 152, *Run & Gun*.

Successful melee attacks against a critter with Energy Aura also damage the attacker. The attacker makes a Damage Resistance Test against a DV equal to the critter's Magic x 2 (and don't forget any elemental effects). This attack has an AP of -(critter's Magic). Unless indicated in the critter's description, this power is always on and cannot be turned off.

ELEMENTAL EFFECTS

TYPE	PAGE REF.
Acid	p. 170, *SR5*
Cold	p. 170, *SR5*
Electricity	p. 170, *SR5*
Fire	p. 171, *SR5*

ENERGY DRAIN

Type: M **Action:** Complex
Range: Touch or LOS **Duration:** Permanent

This especially nasty power allows the critter to suck away some critical element of your life—your age, Essence, Force, Karma, or Magic. Critters with a strong physical aspect to them (meaning they are material most of the time), including mutant and toxic critters, need to use Touch to drain energy; a few rare, spirit-based critters can use line of sight, though that is generally restricted to shadow spirits. Draining a point of Essence, Force, Karma, or Magic, or a year of life, requires a Willpower + Magic [Mental] (10 - target's Essence or Force, 1 minute) Extended Test. If the critter is disturbed or interrupted at any point before the test is successfully completed, the point or year is not drained. If the test is successful, the point leaves the victim and is acquired by the predator. Points lost this way are gone permanently.

In addition to the lost point, victims suffer 1 box of damage for each point loss. For the critters in this book, that damage is Stun and may be healed normally. Victims drained of age, though, show the effects of aging, which cannot be reversed.

If a person's Magic is drained to 0, they burn out and lose their ability. If a critter's Magic is drained to 0, the critter dies. If anything's Force is drained to 0, it is destroyed. If any being's Essence is drained to 0, it dies.

ENTROPIC AURA

Type: P **Action:** Auto
Range: Self **Duration:** Always

The spirit accelerates decay, time, and just plain entropy in its vicinity. When on the physical plane, the spirit exudes its entropic aura to a range equal to its Magic rating in meters. Within this aura, inanimate objects age at ten times their normal rate. Worse, the number of 1's required for a glitch is reduced by one-third the spirit's Magic rating, rounded up.

EXTRA FRAGILE

Type: P **Action:** Auto
Range: Self **Duration:** Always

The critter has strengths, because otherwise it doesn't live, but physical hardiness is not one of them. Physical and Stun Condition Monitors are set to 1, regardless of Body or Willpower levels.

FEY GLAMOUR

Type: M **Action:** Complex
Range: Special **Duration:** Sustained

The critter alters the perceptions of beings within its sphere of influence, causing intruders to see terrain as whatever the creature wishes. Thus, someone might see a swamp as solid ground, rusting metal pillars as verdant trees, or a gaping abyss as a shallow river spanned by a solid stone bridge. The power works on the subconscious, so victims rationalize any inconsistencies in what they see, making it part of the illusion, even with special vision, drone feeds, astral perception, or even their friends' warnings.

Fey Glamour affects all beings within (Magic x 50) meters. The critter sets the threshold of the illusion with a Charisma + Magic Test. Another being encountering the illusion makes a free Intuition + Willpower test, and if he doesn't get enough hits to meet or beat the threshold, he's fully taken in by the glamour.

FLAY TOUCH

Type: P **Action:** Complex
Range: Touch **Duration:** Instant

This extremely grisly power literally tears the skin off of a target. The critter makes a standard Unarmed Combat attack, but if the attack does any unresisted Physical damage to the target, mark those boxes on the Condi-

tion Monitor to indicate that the victim's skin has been torn. Each such box imposes a -1 wound modifier in addition to normal modifiers until they are healed.

If a target's Physical Condition Monitor is filled with more than half of its boxes caused by this power, the critter has completely torn the victim's skin from its body. Good news for riggers, though: This power only works on targets with skin.

FRAGILE

Type: P **Action:** Auto
Range: Self **Duration:** Always

The critter is somewhat brittle and easily broken. When listed in the critter's stat block, this power will have a level; for example, it might read Fragile (2). The critter's Physical Condition Monitor is reduced by the level of this power.

GESTALT CONSCIOUSNESS

Type: M **Action:** Auto
Range: varies **Duration:** Always

The critter communicates with others of the same type on a subconscious level, as though each individual critter is part of a single whole. All critters of the same type with this power share a single mind, can perceive everything any of the members of the gestalt can perceive, and act in concert. Any number of gestalt members can use teamwork on any test they can reasonably work together on—for simplicity, have each member buy hits (p. 45, *SR5*).

This power's range, which expresses the maximum distance a critter can be from its fellows and still be part of the gestalt, depends on the critter and is listed with the critter's stat block. If no range is given, assume line of sight.

GHOST CHAIN

Type: M **Action:** Auto
Range: Special **Duration:** Always

A Ghost Chain is a connection of an extraplanar being to a physical object. It cannot be simply any physical object; it has to be something they feel connected to, whether it be because they believe they used the object in some former state of existence, or they have some mental delusion making them believe they have an attachment to it, or some other reason. The important thing is, they cannot deliberately choose to make a chain; the selection happens subconsciously. When beings have a chain, they receive +2 dice any test to resist banishment when within 10 meters of the object, and +1 when between 10 to 50 meters from the object. They also do not experience the penalties of being away from their Haunt (see **Haunt** power below).

Ghost Chains are slightly different for grim reapers. They do not form their chains subconsciously; rather, each victim they claim becomes part of their Ghost Chain. They do not gain the banishment bonus from items in their chain, but they can animate them as corps cadavres (p. 28, *Hard Targets*).

GILLS

Type: P **Action:** Auto
Range: Self **Duration:** Always

The critter can breathe underwater, meaning the critter can breathe salt or freshwater (depending on their habitat—they can't breathe both) but not air. If they are not underwater, the critter can function for about five minutes until they are left doing nothing but struggle for oxygen. From there, it is not long until death if they don't get back underwater.

HAUNT

Type: M **Action:** Auto
Range: Special **Duration:** Always

Critters that form a Haunt gain a special attachment to a particular area. As is the case with Ghost Chains above, this is not done consciously; the connection is made by the mysterious operations of their sub-consciousness. Haunts may vary in size but can never be larger than 1,000 square meters per point of Force. The structure in which the critter lives may be larger than that, which simply means there is a preferred part of the structure the critter frequents. The Haunt functions as a personal domain (p. 205, *Street Grimoire*), creating a background count aspected toward the critter. When the Haunt is first formed, it starts at Rating 1, and can go as high as Force / 2. Increases in the Rating take at least a month to materialize, sometimes longer according to gamemaster discretion.

Along with the background count, the Haunt gives the critter power over the physical environment, as if they had Mass Animate cast over the area without having to sustain it.

When away from their haunt, critters feel disoriented, taking a -1 dice pool penalty to all skill tests.

HIDDEN LIFE

Type: P **Action:** Complex
Range: Touch **Duration:** Permanent

The spirit uses this power to permanently place its life force in a creature, place, or object. As long as the hiding place remains intact, the spirit cannot be permanently banished or destroyed. It is possible for the spirit to be banished by use of its spirit formula, which banishes the spirit for a year and a day (sooner if the banisher calls the spirit back with the same formula).

The hiding place gains Immunity to Normal Weapons and Immunity to Age (p. 397, *SR5*) using the spirit's Magic Rating. If the hidden life holder is destroyed, the life force returns to the spirit, and the spirit loses this power's special protections until it can find a new hiding place.

INNATE RITUAL

Type: as ritual **Action:** as ritual
Range: as ritual **Duration:** as ritual

This power allows the critter to instinctively cast a single, specific ritual. To use this power effectively, the critter has to have the Ritual Spellcasting skill. Innate Rituals are chosen from the list of rituals available to magicians, and follow all rules pertaining to ritual magic, including Drain, teamwork, reagent expenditure, and everything else that can be found starting on p. 295, *SR5*. Critters and spirits resist Drain with either Intuition or Charisma, at the gamemaster's discretion.

MAGIC SENSE

Type: M **Action:** Auto
Range: Self **Duration:** Always

The critter can find magic like trouble finds shadowrunners. The critter is aware of the presence of any magic with a Force or Magic Rating within a radius of ten meters times its own Magic Rating. This power isn't as precise as Astral Perception and only detects the magic's presence, not its nature.

MAGICAL GUARD

Type: M **Action:** Auto
Range: Self **Duration:** Always

The critter has the Counterspelling skill and can use it in all the ways described in the Counterspelling section on p. 294, *SR5*.

MANIPULATE MAGIC

Type: M **Action:** Complex
Range: Touch **Duration:** Permanent

The critter can transfer magic into or away from a ritual or preparation. They must make an Alchemy + Magic [Astral] vs. Potency x 2 Test for preparations, or a Spellcasting + Magic [Astral] vs. Force x 2 Test for rituals, to manipulate the potency or Force of the object/spell in question. The critter can then raise or lower the potency or Force by 1 per net hit. Once a ritual has expired or a preparation has cast its spell, the critter can do nothing to bring that power back.

MIND LINK

Type: M **Action:** Simple
Range: LOS **Duration:** Sustained

A critter with the Mind Link power can open and maintain telepathic mental communication with another sapient creature. It can maintain a number of mental links at one time equal to its Magic attribute. If multiple beings are engaged via Mind Link with the same spirit, they may communicate freely with each other as well as the original spirit.

PESTILENCE

Type: M **Action:** Complex
Range: Area **Duration:** Instant

The critter can wipe out swaths of life simply by moving through an area. When the critter uses this power, every living thing within (critter's Magic) meters is attacked by a magical disease. Each target makes a Disease Resistance Test (Body + Willpower + any disease protections or resistances) against the pestilence. Unless the critter's description specifies otherwise, use the Pestilence Disease stat block.

PESTILENCE DISEASE

- **Vector:** Inhaled, Contact, Ingestion
- **Speed:** 1 Combat Turn
- **Penetration:** Critter's Magic Rating
- **Power:** Critter's Magic Rating x 2
- **Effect:** Physical Damage, Nausea, Paralysis

The disease from Pestilence remains on the target for a day and pass to other living beings.

POUNCE

Type: P **Action:** Complex
Range: Touch **Duration:** Instant

The critter makes a running leap onto the target, bowling her over. The critter makes a normal attack (usually an Unarmed Combat Test) and subtracts the number of meters it ran or sprinted from the target's Physical limit when calculating whether the target is knocked down (**Knockdown**, p. 194, *SR5*).

SECRETION/ SUBSTANCE EXTRUSION (ANTI-COAGULANT)

Type: P **Action:** Auto
Range: Self **Duration:** Always

The critter's attack carries some form of anti-coagulant that keeps the target's blood from clotting. Once hit with this power, the victim's blood continues to flow, causing two boxes of Stun damage every minute that cannot be resisted. The bleeding can be stopped with a medkit (or better medical equipment) and a First Aid + Logic [Mental] (3) Test.

SECRETION/ SUBSTANCE EXTRUSION (SILK/WEBBING)

Type: P **Action:** Complex
Range: Self **Duration:** Permanent

Silk is incredibly strong—nature's cables. The critter can create silk the length of its twice its body length as a Complex Action to use as it pleases. The silk can be wrapped around a target (requiring an Unarmed Combat test if the target is still moving), used to create part of a web, or even thrown to attach to surfaces or targets.

SHIFT (DRACOFORM)

Type: M **Action:** Complex
Range: Self **Duration:** Sustained

The defining ability of a drake, this is the power to transform into a draconic hybrid form. When activated, the character gains the powers listed in the Dracoform Table (p. 163) as well as any optional powers they have purchased. The character can remain in this form for a number of rounds equal to twice their Magic Rating, after which they take 2S drain unresisted each round until they return to their metahuman form.

SPIRIT PACT

Type: M **Action:** Special
Range: Special **Duration:** Special

A critter with this power can enter into one or more spirit pacts (p. 137, *Street Grimoire*). The gamemaster has final say on what pacts a spirit can enter into.

TOUGHNESS

Type: P **Action:** Auto
Range: Self **Duration:** Always

The critter is a tough little son of a beast. Each level of this power adds one box to the critter's Physical Condition Monitor. If no level is listed, use the critter's Magic rating.

VANISHING

Type: M **Action:** Free
Range: Self **Duration:** Special

Simply put, the critter is capable of vanishing without a trace; their material and astral forms entirely go away, without interference from physical or mental barriers. Some critters may use a Complex Action to reappear, but in many cases the Vanishing is triggered by a certain event, such as the critter's death, that makes re-emergence difficult.

VENOM (ARCANE INHIBITOR)

Type: P **Action:** Auto
Range: Touch **Duration:** Instant

Venom with this quality temporarily reduces the victim's Magic by the Power of the venom. If the Power is greater than the victim's Magic Rating, they cannot use Magic until the power of the venom is reduced. As the Power is reduced, Magic comes back normally.

VESTIGIAL WINGS

Type: P **Action:** Auto
Range: Self **Duration:** Always

Possessed by most drakes and common in chimeric creatures where wings are genetically grafted into a species which does not have them, these wings are insufficient for true flight due to the lack of appropriate musculature and low body weight found in flying critters. These wings are not without benefit however. If a creature with Vestigial Wings should happen to fall, reduce the effective distance of a fall by 4 meters when calculating the falling damage (p. 172, *SR5*) and they receive a +2 dice pool modifier on Jumping tests (p. 134, *SR5*).

WALL WALKING

Type: P **Action:** Auto
Range: Self **Duration:** Always

Critters with this power can walk on walls, ceilings, or other similar surfaces at their normal movement rates. No special tests are needed for regular movement on these surfaces, but the Climbing skill should be used instead of Running for Sprinting tests.

TECHNOCRITTER POWERS

AR-PARALLELISM

This power allows critters to see the physical and virtual worlds at the same time. This is similar to seeing the AR overlay of the world, but it carries no penalty due to distractions or otherwise.

BLEND

The critter can opt to run silent with a Simple Action, just as other Matrix denizens do, and they receive +2 dice to oppose any Matrix Perception tests to spot them.

COZENGE

The critter has a gift for convincing hosts and devices that it is an authorized user. On all Matrix actions, reduce the number of marks needed for the action by one, to a minimum of one.

E-HIVE

The critters can combine their individual talents into a hive, working together toward a greater whole. Critters must be within signal range of each other to act as part of a hive. When functioning as a hive, critters count as a single persona. The hive has a Resonance attribute equal to the average Resonance of beings in the hive, +1 for every two critters in the hive, to a maximum boost of 10. Matrix attributes receive the same boost as Resonance.

GREMLINS

The critter has an ability—very inconvenient in critters embedded in technology—to make devices malfunction. This functions the same way as the Gremlins negative quality (p. 81, *SR5*)

HOLOGRAPHIC CONCEALMENT

When there is a significant amount of AR in an area, the critter can use a Complex Action to place a hologram over themselves that makes them hard to see. The critter's Resonance becomes a negative dice pool modifier on any Perception test to see it, and ranged weapons tests against it receive a -2 dice penalty while the power is active.

RESONANCE FEED

The critter can eat Resonance. The amount of Resonance surrounding them means their diet does not affect many Matrix activities, but it gives them a good chance to hunt down anyone or anything using technology. They receive a +1 bonus on Perception tests or Tracking tests against anyone or anything that has wireless capabilities; this moves up to +2 for devices or beings with a Device Rating or Resonance of 4 or more, and +3 for devices or beings with a Device Rating or Resonance of 7 or more.

SPRAYING

Technocritters mark their virtual territory to make it clear that it's theirs and should not be disturbed. The virtual sensations generated by this spray often makes visitors to the territory feel uneasy. Any persona or icon in the critter's marked territory must make a Firewall + Logic test vs. the critter's Resonance x 2, or suffer a -1 modifier to all Matrix actions in the marked territory due to a feeling of unease. Traces of this spraying may be noticed; treat these traces as running silent for the purposes of Matrix Perception, and use Resonance x 2 for the opposed test to spot it. If seen, traces of the spraying may be removed with an Edit File action, again opposed by the critter's Resonance x 2.

TRACEROUTE

The critter has an instinct for hunting things down in the Matrix, giving it +2 dice to any Trace Icon actions.

TUNNEL

The critter doesn't bother with conventional paths through the Matrix; instead, it makes its own. It does not need a mark to enter or exit a host.

VENOMOUS CODE

Somewhat related to some critter's ability to transform Resonance into food, this ability allows critters to turn code into poison with real, physical effects. The critter can select whether the venom takes effect with each successful hit or mot. They must damage another icon in cybercombat to have this venom take effect. It is treated as a toxin (p. 408, *SR5*) with the following attributes: Vector: Cybercombat damage; Speed: 1; Power: 6; Effect: Matrix Damage.

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THE WILD CALLS

Gangers. Corp security. Mr. Johnson. Organized crime. Other shadowrunners. Running in the Sixth World does not exactly lack for obstacles, but only foolish runners worry solely about metahuman opponents. There are plenty of other ways the world can kill you, from throat-ripping martachoras to blood-sucking chupacabras, from the aggressive gamma spider to the swarming harpy. While most runners would be happy to simply avoid these threats, it's not always possible. Critters may be used as security, they may swarm in abandoned areas runners must investigate, or they may carry valuable reagents runners need. Some of them may even hold the keys to unlocking the sort of powers runners covet.

Howling Shadows is the critter sourcebook for *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition*. With a broad range of critters for every habitat, the book has plot hooks that show how critters may be used in campaigns, details on new critter powers, and other information to flesh out *Shadowrun* adventures and campaigns. Sink your teeth into this one and see how untamed the Sixth World can be.

Howling Shadows is for use with *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition*.

SHADOWRUN
FIFTH EDITION

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